

THE INFLUENCE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE ON CHARLES BAUDELAIRE'S PROSE
POEMS IN *LE SPLEEN DE PARIS*

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an analysis of the important works of Edgar Allan Poe alongside the prose poems of Charles Baudelaire in order to quantify the extent of the influence which the American author exerted on the French poet. It concludes that the influence is largely one of unconscious assimilation, even though it identifies notable examples of prose poems which are immediately recognisable in the similarity of their form and/or content to Poe's tales.

It was Baudelaire, himself, who first became aware of the affinity that existed between him and Poe when he read a translation of 'The Black Cat'. He was struck by the uncanny resemblance of the American author's work to his own, even to the extent of constructing the same sentences without any previous familiarity with his work. His discovery led him to establish a strong personal identification with Poe, partly as a result of pre-existing resemblances contained in their publications, and partly as a result of Baudelaire's subsequent portrayal of Poe as an American version of himself. Baudelaire saw in Poe the same sense of rebellion against the contemporaneous literary

establishment which he recognised in himself, and which was an essential motivating force for both authors in their quest for modernity. Establishing a new direction in poetry was all the more difficult for Baudelaire, given his staunch attachment to the status quo, but his discovery of Poe reinforced his ground-breaking ideas, and gave him the confidence to innovate, in the knowledge that there was at least one prestigious author whose thoughts on literary composition matched his own. I trace the route taken by Baudelaire in transforming the conventional, predominantly alexandrine poetry of *Les Fleurs du Mal* into the revolutionary prose poetry of *Le Spleen de Paris*. The prose poems are synonymous with Baudelaire's modernity, and their publication late in his career meant that they were subject to the full influence of his much-admired translations of Poe's tales. These translations not only presented the tales in a form which was readily acceptable to the French reading public, but they also provided Baudelaire with a vast store of knowledge and skills which he later put to use in his own poetry, sometimes adopting Poe's style in a consciously imitative way, but more often reflecting the sort of indirect influence which could be classified as unconscious. It also provided Baudelaire with a valuable training ground from which he could learn from his own methods and apply them to his prose poems – a process which could be described as self-reflexive.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

For references to all Baudelaire's work, I have used *Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes*, edited by Claude Pichois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols (Paris: NRF, Gallimard), 1975-1976, referred to simply as *OCI* or *OCII* followed by the page number.

For references to Poe's tales and poems, I have used *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Wordsworth Library Collection published 2009 by Wordsworth Editions Limited. All references to this collection are signified by the abbreviation *WLC* followed by the page number.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the nineteenth century there was a growing awareness of the affinity that existed between Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe. In a paper entitled 'Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Poe: A literary affinity' (1893), Esme Stuart quotes Baudelaire's prose poem, 'L'Etranger' (Stuart 1893, p.76) which describes the author's abhorrence of the bourgeois veneration of material progress, and laments their lack of appreciation for beauty in art. What Baudelaire recognised in French society had already been identified by Poe as a regrettable feature of the American public, for whom progress was measured in technological advances and industrial growth, to the detriment of artistic endeavour. Stuart's use of the first prose poem in *Le Spleen de Paris* in this paper is exceptional because, at the time, critical interest in Baudelaire's work was almost entirely devoted to *Les Fleurs du Mal* (published in 1857). The publicity attached to the trial of that year and the subsequent removal of six offending verse poems and then its republication in 1862, certainly added to its notoriety.

Jonathan Culler (1990) cites several of the authors who have commented on Poe's influence on Baudelaire including Arthur Patterson who claimed that, 'Personne ne s'est jamais plus profondément pénétré des oeuvres d'un auteur

que Baudelaire de celles de Poe' (Patterson in Culler 1990, p.64). Reflecting the less adulatory view of Poe by Anglo-Saxon critics Culler cites P.M. Wetherill in *Charles Baudelaire et la poésie d'Edgar Allan Poe*: 'Il serait difficile de trouver un autre exemple d'un homme si cultivé, d'un critique si pénétrant, poète lui-même, admirant avec tant d'enthousiasme un si médiocre poète' (Wetherill in Culler 1990, p.64). There were also sceptics like Lloyd Austin who, in *Univers poétique de Baudelaire* contends that, 'L'influence de Poe sur Baudelaire a toutefois été moins grande qu'on ne l'a souvent dit' (Austin in Culler 1990, p.64).

In Paul Valéry's essay, 'Situation de Baudelaire' (1924), he claims that the works of Edgar Poe opened up a new intellectual world for Baudelaire, in which 'Son talent en est transformé, sa destinée en est magnifiquement changée' (Valéry 1924, p.7). In Valéry's view Baudelaire's destiny would have been that of a mere disciple of Gautier had this transformation not taken place. In Poe he discovered:

Le démon de la lucidité, le génie de l'analyse, et l'inventeur des combinaisons les plus neuves et les plus séduisantes de la logique avec l'imagination, de la mysticité avec le calcul, le psychologue de l'exception, l'ingénieur littéraire qui approfondit et utilise toutes les ressources de l'art... (Valéry 1924, p.7).

To these conflicting opinions must be added that of T.S. Eliot whose estimation of Poe is damning:

If we examine his work in detail, we seem to find in it nothing but slipshod writing, puerile thinking unsupported by wide reading or profound scholarship, haphazard experiments in various types of writing, chiefly under pressure of financial need, without perfection in any detail (Eliot 1949, p.327).

As part of his argument, he includes a comprehensive vilification of 'The Raven', Poe's best known and most highly successful poem. Then, moving on to Poe's, *The Philosophy of Composition* (Poe 1846), which purports to explain his method of composing this poem, Eliot posits a reason for the essay's underwhelming impact on Anglo-Saxon critics as compared to its success in France. He suggests that it might have been either a hoax or a piece of self-deception in 'setting down the way in which he wanted to think that he had written it' (Eliot 1949, p.333). The result was that it was not taken as seriously in England or America as it was in France.

Accepting that Poe was much more highly esteemed in France, he then addresses the question of what it was that Baudelaire (and then Mallarmé and then Valéry) saw in the American that was not apparent to his own countrymen. His answer was that none of these three writers had a strong

enough grasp of the English language to enable them to recognise the weaknesses in Poe's work, of which the anglophone reader would be only too well aware. Grudgingly, he accepts that Baudelaire must have read a certain amount of English and American poetry, but that he was never familiar with England and 'there is no reason to suppose that he spoke the language at all well' (Eliot 1949, p.336). Eliot used this supposed linguistic weakness to explain how it was possible to arrive at a translation of Poe's work, which was sometimes a striking improvement on the original:

It is certainly possible, in reading something in a language imperfectly understood, for the reader to find what is not there; and when the reader is himself a man of genius, the foreign poem read may, by a happy accident, elicit something important from the depths of his own mind, which he attributes to what he reads (Eliot 1949, p.336).

Eliot and Lemonnier agree that, regardless of any literary considerations, what drew Baudelaire to Poe was the American's personality. In Poe, Baudelaire recognised one of society's outcasts – 'le poète maudit' – in his life story and his worldly failure. He contended that the United States had become for Poe a vast prison in which he struggled to be appreciated (Culler 1990, p.64). His identification with this personality was so complete that he projected onto Poe his own sense of isolation and his feeling of despair, faced

with the materialistic values of French society. In the words of Lemonnier, 'L'Américain apportait, à cet égard, un système psychologique et esthétique complet, que le Français adopta sans la moindre modification' (Lemonnier 1932, p.40).

In *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (1957, p.8) Patrick Quinn took up Eliot's challenge that Anglo-Saxon poets 'should be prepared to entertain the possibility that these Frenchmen have seen something in Poe that English-speaking readers have missed' (Eliot 1949, p.328). In this book Quinn asserts that:

It was the discovery of Poe by Baudelaire that finally brought France into the mainstream of modern literature. For here was a writer who combined what the French could see and appreciate, a sense of form and respect for the intellect, with... the ability to move as in dreams through the depths of the mind and to illuminate the kind of verities the reason knows not of (Quinn 1957, p.44).

Quinn thinks the influence that Poe brought to bear could not be measured in terms of 'artful plagiarism' which could be unearthed and documented, but rather a kind of assimilated influence which counts for much more (Quinn 1957, p.214).

Régis Michaud felt that Poe's influence on Baudelaire had been exaggerated. In complete contradiction to the words of Lemonnier above, Michaud contended that, 'avant de découvrir Poe, Baudelaire est déjà complètement équipé du côté vie et du côté art et poésie. Sa psychologie est fixée et il est en possession de son esthétique' (Michaud 1938, p.669).

Michaud questioned the claims of Seylaz who wrote, 'toute la matière poétique des *Fleurs du Mal* a été profondément nourrie par l'oeuvre entière de l'écrivain américain' (Seylaz in Michaud 1938, p.670 n1). In equally laudatory terms Cambiaire asserted: 'Baudelaire knew Poe, admired him, translated his works, and considered him as his literary Messiah, his initiator, his spiritual brother. How could he do otherwise than imitate him?' (Cambiaire in Michaud 1938, p.675 n2). According to Michaud, these claims were not only exaggerated they were also at odds with the chronology given by Michaud, Lemonnier, and confirmed by W.T. Bandy, which established that the greater part of *Les Fleurs du Mal* were composed before 1847, and so could not have been influenced by Poe. From his investigations Bandy concludes that:

If as late as 1852, Baudelaire had read, and probably not long before, only three or four of Poe's poems and none of his critical articles, it stands to reason that such critics as Lemonnier, who minimised the

possibility of such influence, are on very solid ground (Bandy 1952, p. 69).

There is clearly, therefore, a diverse range of opinions on the extent to which Poe's work influenced Baudelaire, but it seems that the criticism can be divided into two general categories. On the one hand the Anglo-Saxon critics had a tendency to disparage the work of Poe, whilst admiring the work of Baudelaire, but on the other hand their French counterparts recognised the important role played by Poe in Baudelaire's success as a poet.

Michaud identifies a tendency which is common to some of the researchers in the field. It is the temptation to make sweeping generalisations (often based on prejudgements) for which the evidence is weak. To illustrate this practice, he quotes the work of Seylaz (in Michaud 1938, p.672) who claims that Baudelaire's sonnet, 'Correspondances' (*OCI*, p.11) is simply a compilation of lines drawn from the work of Poe. In the sonnet, Baudelaire makes a link between the colour orange and the buzzing of a mosquito, and Seylaz asserts that Baudelaire *must certainly* (Seylaz's words – Michaud's italics) have had in mind Poe's poem, 'Al Araf', which contains the lines:

All Nature speaks, and ev'n ideal things

Flap shadowy sounds from invisible wings... (*WLC*, p.757).

The tenuous link between the two pieces of work is a good example of seeing similarities in the authors' works which could be purely coincidental. If, as Compagnon suggests (2014, p.27), commentary on *Le Spleen de Paris* had reached saturation point in 2014, and that genuinely new insights into the influence of Poe on Baudelaire were henceforth difficult to find, is there not a danger that such artificial parallels will continue to proliferate? A similar eagerness for identifying links between Poe and *Le Spleen de Paris* is shown in the example given by Sonya Stephens (1999, p.66), where she claims to recognise a deliberate pun in the use of the phrase 'pot de fleurs' which the narrator of 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' (*OCl*, p.285) uses to destroy the glazier's panes of glass. For Stephens the expression is a pun on Baudelaire's own creative armoury – Poe/*Fleurs du Mal*. Is it too cynical to suggest that this proposed play on words could be a product of Stephens's own creativity, rather than that of the author of the prose poem? The present dissertation will be undertaken hand in hand with a healthy degree of scepticism in regard to literary influence.

The debate on influence has persisted since Baudelaire's death, but, with the exception of Esme Stuart, it has been largely restricted to *Les Fleurs du Mal*. In the sixteen-page article written by Michaud in 1938 there is no mention of *Le Spleen de Paris* or any of the fifty prose poems contained in it.

Even as late as 1959 (in *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours*), it was Suzanne Bernard's thesis that the movement towards prose poems rather than verse had simply been 'un symptôme d'impuissance' (Bernard in Compagnon 2014 p.24), rather than the establishment of a viable new genre. However, there had already been support for the prose poem from Georges Blin who welcomed it in his introduction to *Le Spleen de Paris* in 1946: 'Autant que le permettent les lois de la création littéraire, *Les Petits Poèmes en prose* marquent un commencement absolu' (Blin in Compagnon 2014, p.25).

Even though Baudelaire himself, in a letter addressed to Victor Hugo, described the prose poems as a 'pendant' to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Claude Pichois (*OCI*, p.1293) regretted the lack of interest shown in *Le Spleen de Paris* in the 1970s, and lamented that the importance of the collection had not been fully recognised. However, writing in 2014, Compagnon estimated that, since the 1980s, that situation had been reversed: '*Le Spleen de Paris* est même l'un des boulevards baudelairiens les plus fréquentés par la critique, peut-être jusqu'à la saturation' (Compagnon 2014, p.27). Compagnon points out, in particular, that the critical acclaim accompanying the renewed focus on the prose poems in the 1980s and 1990s in universities in the United Kingdom and in the United States (especially pertaining to those which could be associated with social themes like 'Assommons les pauvres!', 'Le Mauvais Vitrier', 'Le Gateau', 'Les

Yeux des pauvres', 'Une Mort héroïque', 'La Fausse Monnaie' and 'La Corde'), was evidence that the importance of the *Le Spleen de Paris* had, at last, been fully recognised. This renewed interest persisted into the present century with publications like *Logiques du dernier Baudelaire: Lectures du Spleen de Paris* (Murphy, 2003 and 2007), and *Baudelaire's Le Spleen de Paris: Shifting Perspectives* (Scott, 2005). Scott's book highlights the strong link between Baudelaire's 'Les Foules' and Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd', as well as noting the skilful use of narrators and the predilection for hoaxing which were common to both authors. Murphy's collection recognises the debt which Baudelaire owed to Poe – 'De Maistre et Poe m'ont appris à raisonner' (Murphy 2007, p.677). Yet neither of these publications sets out expressly to estimate the influence which Poe had on the prose poems, despite the widespread references to his work.

Whilst acknowledging the extensive scholarship devoted to the comparison of the works of Poe and Baudelaire, Sonya Isaak contends that most of this work mentions their affinities only in passing, and maintains that there is a lack of longer comparative studies relating the work of both authors (Isaak 2020, p.24). Isaak's conviction that there exists an aesthetic architecture in Baudelaire's oeuvre, is based on a claim made by Barbey d'Aurevilly during the 1857 trial that *Les Fleurs du Mal* was not a random collection of individual

pieces, but belonged to an 'architecture secrète' in which the lyric poems were 'moins des poésies qu'une oeuvre poétique de la plus forte unité' (Isaak 2020, p.35). She contends that *Le Spleen de Paris* was created to echo the themes of the verse collection, in the belief that Baudelaire intended there to be a deliberate correlation between the two. Her contention is that there is an intentional intertextuality pervading the whole corpus, and that a corresponding architecture can be found in the work of Poe. Unfortunately, the disadvantage of this approach in regard to the influence that Poe had on Baudelaire, is that it tends to reduce *Le Spleen de Paris* to a role subordinate to *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It is my thesis, in contradiction to Isaak but supported by Jonathan Culler, that 'where Poe influenced Baudelaire most deeply, where Baudelaire proved an astute and powerful reader of Poe, is in Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*' (Culler 1990, p.65). In regard to influence, therefore, the prose poems are worthy of separate study, to which the present research aims to make a contribution.

My starting point in that study is that Poe and Baudelaire used their imagination to change the status quo and to make giant strides in what is termed modernity. The modernity I subscribe to here is that of Valéry, which, in terms of poetry, excluded from itself anything which took the form of narrative, like descriptions or story-line. According to Valéry, 'Poe opened a

path by forging a doctrine of absolute poetry, *la poésie absolue*, a poetry capable of combining mathematical precision with mystical elements of form and substance' (Valéry in Newmark 2015, p.3). I will show that the irony pervading many of Poe's works left a lasting impression on Baudelaire, such that in his prose poems the reader is never sure whether they are to take the written word at face value, or whether a deeper interpretation is called for. Lubell contends that it was from A. W. Schlegel, amongst other German critics, that Poe learned the art of composing works, 'in which there lies beneath the transparent upper current of meaning an under or suggestive one' (Lubell 1953, p.8). According to G.R. Thompson (1973, p.12): 'It has been insufficiently recognised that it is the Continental movement or school of irony that comprised Poe's basic intellectual, philosophical, and artistic milieu'.

Floyd Stovall (1930) contends that the source of Poe's knowledge of this Continental movement was Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) which contained 'a digest of an entire school of philosophy and criticism, but also a variety of sources to which he (Poe) might otherwise not have been introduced' (Stovall 1930, p.80). In an era when there were no international copyright laws proscribing the appropriation of material and ideas from one country to another it was considered acceptable to borrow the work of foreign authors and it seems Poe exploited this custom with regard to Coleridge. An

illustration of Coleridge's influence on him is given by Daniel Hoffman (1973, pp.84-85). He compares a passage in the preface to Poe's *Poems* (1831) with a sentence from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Poe's passage is as follows:

A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure not truth; to romance, by having for its object an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained.... (Hoffman 1973, p.84 – Poe's italics).

Coleridge had written: 'A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth' (Hoffman 1973, p.84). The similarity – even as far as the use of italics – is too close to be a matter of chance and, consequently, a charge of plagiarism would be difficult to defend. The rest of Coleridge's sentence is not directly plagiarised by Poe but the student of Poe would recognise the debt he owed to the sentiment expressed: '... (the poem) is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part' (Hoffman 1973, p.85). This reads very much like the method of composition described by Poe in *The Philosophy of Composition* (Poe 1846), where he insists that each part of the poem must

point to the dénouement. The obvious conclusion, therefore, is that Poe was heavily influenced by Coleridge.

In Poe's Letter to B--- which he used as a preface to the third edition of his poems in 1831 he quotes from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, London 1817, p.121:

Of Coleridge I cannot speak but with reverence. His towering intellect!

His gigantic power: To use an author quoted by himself, "J'ai trouvé

souvent que la plupart des sectes ont raison dans une bonne partie de

ce qu'elles avancent, mais non pas en ce qu'elles nient," and to employ

his own language, he has imprisoned his own conceptions by the barrier

he has erected against those of others (in Stovall 1930, p.71).

When the 'Letter to B---' was reprinted in 1836 Poe struck out the phrases 'to use an author quoted by himself', and 'to employ his own language' and so worded his sentence that the reader would not know that he had borrowed the passage from Coleridge. In both places Poe misquotes by omitting the word 'tant', which in the *Biographia Literaria* stands after 'pas'. The quotation appears in '*Marginalia*, Works, Vol. XVI.' p.98, with the same omission and with no mention of Coleridge. Again, Poe has succumbed to the temptation of adopting Coleridge's work as his own (Stovall 1930, p.71), albeit in the full awareness that the stamp of Coleridge could be recognised in his work.

Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* contains A.W. Schlegel's theories of criticism which were described in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (translated into English in 1815). Whether Poe got his ideas from Coleridge or directly from Schlegel it seems that he is indebted to the latter for his literary theory. F.C. Prescott says: 'He undoubtedly got from Schlegel the principle of 'unity' or totality of interest...' (Stovall 1930, p.92 n50). It is not improbable that Coleridge was influenced by Schlegel to adopt the idea and Schlegel, as Prescott points out, had found the idea or the source of the idea, in reading the eighteenth-century French critic, Houdart de la Motte. Likewise, a seventeenth-century writer, François Hédelin, was responsible for the theory that a long poem is a contradiction in terms (Quinn 1954, p. 36). In addition, Poe's theory that poetry's prime objective was the creation of beauty, is an idea that could well have been borrowed from the first page of Schlegel's *Lectures*. My ultimate purpose in tracing this sequence is to demonstrate that there is no such thing as absolute originality. The author simply takes the germ of an idea, which already exists, regardless of its source, and adapts it, improves it, or elaborates on it so that it can be applied to a new set of circumstances, thereby unlocking some previously unseen potential. The process is widespread, whether it be conscious or unconscious. Poe, himself,

was aware that the use of ideas and means of expression drawn from other authors was often unconscious. He drew attention to the process by which, '...an admired passage, being forgotten and afterwards reviving through an exceedingly shadowy train of association, is supposed by the plagiarising poet to be really the coinage of his own brain' (Lloyd 1981, p.75).

It has also been suggested that Poe plagiarised some of the works of Dickens's (Galvan 2009, p.14). Fernando Galvan offers the example of the similarities shown by 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and Dickens's 'A Madman's Manuscript' which Poe reviewed for the *Southern Literary Messenger* in November, 1836. Edward Strickland (in Galvan 2009, p.11) compares the sentences each author uses to create an atmosphere of terror, and finds that the tales share the same psychological perspective, since the two narrators are obsessed with, and subject to, hallucinations. The terse sentences, the use of exclamation marks, dashes and italics, are common to both tales. It was Dickens who wrote to Poe before he composed 'The Raven', asking him if he was aware that Godwin had written *Caleb Williams* backwards, firstly involving his hero in a web of difficulties to form the second volume, and then writing a first volume accounting for what had been done. The idea of the talking raven had also been used before by Charles Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge*. (Dickens, himself, kept a raven as a pet). Poe notes in *The Philosophy of Composition*

that Dickens's comments encouraged Poe to start from the dénouement, keeping it constantly in view so that 'the plot has its indispensable air of consequence or causation by making the incidents and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention' (Poe 1846, p.163).

Poe, as a critic, was a staunch opponent of plagiarism, a campaign he waged most notably through his attacks on Longfellow, a fellow American poet, but the evidence above testifies to his own capacity to adopt the ideas of other authors, whilst often being less than candid about the debt that he owed them. The central question is therefore, what constitutes originality? The answer lies in establishing a genuinely new direction. In Poe's case his originality took the form of new directions in literature such as the establishment of new genres, as evidenced by his pioneering detective stories like 'The Purloined Letter' and 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. In poetry, by his own estimation, Poe judged that he had accomplished an original form of verse in his poem, 'The Raven'. Its claim to originality, as he expressed it in *The Philosophy of Composition*, was less in the individual lines he used to construct the poem than in their combination into stanza – 'nothing even remotely approaching this combination has ever been attempted' (Poe 1846, p.166). The evidence then begs the question, if Poe's own originality was influenced by borrowings from his continental contemporaries or from the giants of the past,

should it be considered improper for Baudelaire to have used the American's ideas?

I will attempt to show in the next three chapters that the word 'plagiarism' is essentially inappropriate when applied to the relationship between Poe and Baudelaire since examples of unattributed copying are few. In the first chapter I will trace Baudelaire's quest for modernity from his increasing frustration with the limitations of early nineteenth-century poetry to the establishment of a new genre, despite his characteristic reluctance to venture beyond the status quo. Much of his thinking on modernity is expressed in his art criticism, in which he deplores the sterility of his artistic contemporaries for their lack of imagination and their fixation with producing exact copies of nature (*OCII*, p.631). He applies this criticism to his own field of poetry, in which the tradition of versification and the hackneyed themes of nature and heroism, had resulted in a fossilisation of the genre. I will describe how Baudelaire harnesses this mounting dissatisfaction to go beyond the existing status quo to experiment with more daring strategies in his verse poems, before forging a new direction with his volume of prose poems, *Le Spleen de Paris*. I will show that his achievement is all the greater for his tenacious attachment to established tradition.

The second chapter will describe the contexts in which both authors produced their works, often in circumstances which called for great strength of character and perseverance. I will show how their dealings with the rapidly expanding industry of the press resulted in both constraints and opportunities, hitherto inexistent for earlier generations of authors, whose publications were largely restricted to book form. I will identify the kind of reader that the authors considered was their target audience, and will show how they were able to manipulate the reader into reflecting on issues suggested by the text, but for which only the reader could supply any resolution. I will show that, for the most part, these ideas were presented in the form of allegory, often using narrators whose views and psychological make-up were entirely detached from those of the authors.

Starting from the premise that there is no such thing as 'absolute originality', chapter three will analyse in more detail where the evidence for influence lies. It will explore the origins of the affinity which Baudelaire recognised on first reading Poe's work, and then distinguish between the more obvious conscious imitation and the less obvious, but more significant unconscious assimilation by Baudelaire, of Poe's themes and style. Based on the two major works of translation of 1857, *Histoires extraordinaires* and *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* this chapter will make the case that, not

only did Baudelaire learn directly from Poe's technique, but that he also learned from himself in the process of translation in the sense that he developed his own technique which he subsequently applied to the writing of his prose poems.

Chapter 1

THE QUEST FOR MODERNITY CULMINATES IN *LE SPLEEN DE PARIS*

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the contribution of both Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire to the modernity of nineteenth century literature, and to show how its ultimate expression took the form of *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire's collection of fifty prose poems. Both authors were pioneers who, although continents apart, had a major effect on the direction of literature. It is this new direction – Newmark refers to it as a moment of change in history and change in aesthetic form indissociable from it – which I understand to be modernity (Newmark 2015, p.1). This change had its roots in the distinct historical and political circumstances that existed in America between 1835 and 1840 (as reported by Alexis de Tocqueville), which contrasted with those of an older, aristocratic nation like France (Kopp in Murphy 2014, p.37). The latter country was governed by a small number of aristocrats who agreed on a set of common principles to which everyone else was obliged to adhere. This was as true in literature as in any other field of human endeavour. In European countries like France there was clear

demarcation between literary genres like poetry and drama, and the relatively new genre of the novel. America, in contrast, was a nation largely composed of immigrants who set out to make their mark as individuals unrestrained by a rigid class system. The scope for individual self-expression was greater and it was, therefore, more difficult to apply strict rules of demarcation in American literature.

The American author, Edgar Allan Poe, held strong views on the capacity of each literary genre to produce an effect on the reader. In *The Philosophy of Composition*, it was his conviction that ‘...the object, Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object, Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable, to a certain extent in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose’ (Poe 1846, p.164). For Poe, ‘Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem’, and by that he meant an ‘intense and pure elevation of soul’ (Poe 1846, p.164), the kind of supernal beauty that can only be glimpsed through art. In the hierarchy of literary forms, poetry, therefore, took pride of place.

Baudelaire agreed (in his *Etudes sur Poe*) that ‘l’idée de beauté ... est le but le plus grand et le plus noble du poème’ (*OCII*, p.329) but that the essential ingredient of the poem was rhythm, and achieving that rhythm placed constraints on the genre, depriving it of forms of expression like reasoning, sarcasm and humour, all of which were detrimental to the quest for beauty. In

Baudelaire's assessment, all the efforts hitherto made in achieving the poetic effect purely through prose, including that of Poe, had been unsuccessful (*OCII*, p.330). Nevertheless, the very fact that Poe wanted his essay, *Eureka*, to be regarded as a prose poem signalled the importance the American attached to a potential new genre.

It was the fixed genres which constituted a barrier to progress in poetry. According to Valéry (in Newmark 2015, p.3), to become 'modern' poetry needed to divest itself of the rigidity of its various domains and modes of activity. Modern poetry could only realise its true nature by reproducing itself in a pure state, distinct from every other type of activity. In *The Philosophy of Composition* Poe propounded his doctrine of poetry where 'the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem' (Poe 1846, p.163), but which also contained 'mystical elements of form and substance' (Valéry in Newmark, p.3). This doctrine clearly inspired Baudelaire because Valéry saw this structure in the poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* whereas he was struck by its absence in the poetry of other authors of the same epoch. He cited 'L'Invitation au Voyage' and 'Correspondances' (both from *Les Fleurs du Mal*) as poems which demonstrated most clearly Baudelaire's application of Poe's 'modern' doctrine. Valéry saw poetry as a charm, an incantatory power of enchantment that

works to purify and deepen ordinary life. For him Baudelaire's modernity is the result of removing poetry from every domain for which an equivalence can be found in narrative form, by which he meant history, legend, philosophy and politics (Valéry in Newmark 2015, p.7). If descriptions occur in Baudelaire's poems, they are rare and always 'significant' and what they signify would have little or nothing to do with their object of reference. According to Valéry:

Baudelaire's poetry, even when it seems to describe empirical reality, does not communicate with history, with legend or belief, with philosophy or politics. Indeed, its form is characterised by an absence of 'earthly time'. Rather its significance resides in the way its language uses affective and intellectual resources to affect an escape from these ordinary and superficial aspects of life (Valéry in Newmark 2015, p.5).

What Valéry was looking for was 'une musique et une forme' (Valéry in Newmark 2015, p.3) and he finds this in poems like 'L'Invitation au Voyage' where the refrain demonstrates this musicality:

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,

Luxe, calme et volupté.

He adapts this refrain to construct a comment on Baudelaire's poetry:

Mais tout y est charme, musique, sensualité puissante et abstraite...Luxe, forme et volupté (Valéry in Newmark 2015 p.3).

The replacement of 'calme' by 'forme' is a neat allusion to the method of construction of a poem which is outlined by Poe (1846) in *The Philosophy of Composition* and which so impressed Baudelaire. It is important to remember that Valéry's comments (made in 1924) relate to the verse poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* only. At this stage *Le Spleen de Paris* had little recognition on its own merits. What scant recognition the prose poems had, came from their relationship as 'pendants' to the verse poems. The term itself suggests an afterthought, a mere extension of the original verse poem.

For Valéry, versification in poetry was obligatory (in Newmark 2015, p.3) and, therefore, prose poems should not be dignified with the term 'poem'. There was even a belief that the prose poems were merely rough sketches for the verse poems, and that prose poems were a symptom of the poet's powerlessness (Compagnon 2014, p.24). However, an indication of Baudelaire's future intentions came in 1859, when he sent for publication 'Les Sept Vieillards', describing it as the first in a new series of verse poems (entitled *Fantômes parisiens*) in which 'je crains d'avoir simplement réussi à dépasser les limites assignées à la Poésie' (Compagnon 2014, p.201). This new series of verse poems, including 'Les Sept Vieillards' and 'Les Petites Vieilles',

used classical alexandrine rhyming schemes to present novel and shocking topics, such that the traditional verse framework seemed progressively less able to accommodate Baudelaire's subject matter. The poems read as though he is trying to achieve, in verse, the conditions of prose. This eventually led to his writing a volume of prose poems, which became *Le Spleen de Paris*.

Baudelaire's first mention of the concept of modernity appears in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*. With reference to the painting of Constantin Guys, he applauds the ability of the painter to extract a mysterious beauty from modern life which might be slight and insignificant in itself, something which is at once fleeting and elusive, but which when allied to another element which is eternal and unchanging, constitutes 'la beauté'. He defines 'La modernité' as 'le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable' (OCII, p.695). This description of modernity is consistent with his criticism of the 'paysagistes' in his *Salon de 1859* (OCII, p.625). He observed in this criticism that, by reproducing a scene from nature in its exactitude, they regarded it as a triumph to exclude any impression of their own personality on the tableau, which was thereby reduced to a banality. He deplored the public admiration for copying, contending that, 'ce qui est positivement et universellement exact n'est jamais admirable' (OCII p.631). In his view, what the public failed to see was that the key element in a painting is

that which is wrought by the painter's imagination. Baudelaire contended that the elements in a painting may be found in a dictionary, the less gifted painters merely copying what the dictionary contains. It is the painter like Guys who is able to add his own interpretation to the contents of the dictionary who captures 'la modernité'. Extending this concept to literature, it was Baudelaire's view that it was the author's imagination which was the key to his art. It is not surprising, therefore, when introduced to the work of Edgar Allan Poe, that he recognised this vital ingredient which drew him to the American writer. In his *Etudes sur Poe* he writes, 'Pour lui, l'Imagination est la reine des facultés' (*OCII*, p.328). Baudelaire's understanding of imagination, in this context, was not that of fantasy, as might be understood by his readers, but a creative imagination which has a much more elevated function.

Baudelaire spent ten years translating Poe and introducing his work to the French public. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that consciously or unconsciously, his own work would accumulate some of the characteristics of the American author's work. From 1855 until the year of his death in 1867, Baudelaire became increasingly occupied by his prose poems, and it was in this work that Poe's influence became most noticeable. Valéry's claim that Baudelaire's prose poetry is to be distinguished from every other kind of prose, could lead to the conclusion that even when Baudelaire writes in prose, he

endows it with a verbal charm that turns it into poetry. The fundamental question to be asked about the prose poems was, therefore, how does a poem in prose differ from ordinary prose? or in what sense can a piece of prose be poetic?

For George Blin the answer to these two questions lies in reading the poem in a metaphorical sense. The reader has to find an 'analogical key' for interpreting their narratives. Blin considers that the prose poem, 'Le Thyse', provides a suitable metaphor for the collection of prose poems as a whole (Blin in Newmark 2015, p.12). A thyse is simply a stick encircled by flowers. The prose poem asks, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un thyse?' to which the answer is, 'Selon le sens moral et poétique, c'est un emblème sacerdotal dans la main des prêtres ou des prêtresses [...] Mais physiquement ce n'est qu'un bâton, un pur bâton' (OCI, p.335). With reference to the *whole* collection of *Le Spleen de Paris* in the metaphorical sense, the stick resembles prose and the flowers resemble poetry. Reading 'Le Thyse' metaphorically, therefore, as a text reflecting on the way *all* the prose poems are supposed to work, endows the whole collection with the kind of poetic and moral meaning that the individual pieces would be missing on their own. A particular analogical key must then be found for each prose poem in order to interpret their narrative. (In the case of 'Le Thyse', since the poem is dedicated to Franz Liszt, it seems likely that the

magic power or charm of the mythological thyrses corresponds, by analogy, to the power exercised by the musical genius of Liszt over his public.)

Blin's interpretation of *Le Spleen de Paris* was made in 1946 – at least eighty years after Baudelaire wrote the prose poems. At that time Baudelaire was associated almost exclusively with the verse poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but Blin was unwavering in his admiration for the anthology of prose poems. Despite this, it has only been since about 1985 that there has been an upsurge in their critical acclaim. This belated interest was largely inspired by the extensive research carried out by Walter Benjamin into Baudelaire's work beginning in the 1920s and lasting until his death in 1940. His essays were not translated into English until the late 1960s and early 1970s and it was only in 1979 that *Charles Baudelaire. Un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme*, was published in France, followed by *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle. Le livre des passages*, as late as 1989.

Benjamin's work was contemporaneous with that of Valéry but he rejected the notion that Baudelaire's poetry was removed from 'earthly time' (Benjamin in Newmark 2015, p.7). On the contrary, Benjamin considered that the poems, both lyric and prose, constituted a form of history of modernity. He compared Baudelaire's poems to a photographer's plates which 'snap' the negative of a scene. There is, however, no developing fluid which can

transform the negative into 'the true essence of things' (Benjamin in Newmark 2015, p.6), and only Baudelaire is able to read the plates. What the reader gets from the poems are 'presentiments', incomplete sketches, hints or 'premonitions' about the true images that could be obtained. Focusing on the *Tableaux Parisiens* of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, he concludes that the lyric voice of the verse poems becomes less able to adequately reflect the changes that the city undergoes during its development from a medieval layout of dwellings into a planned system of wide boulevards, with all the social changes that implies. In the same way that the city becomes 'une ville minée, ville défailante, ville frêle' during the changes instigated by Haussmann, Benjamin observes certain 'défaillances métriques' in Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* (Benjamin in Newmark 2015, p.9). It seemed to Benjamin that the transformation undergone by the city demanded a transformation in Baudelaire's poetic expression, one which was better equipped to reflect the historical, social, political and philosophical changes taking place. Baudelaire, himself, admits as much in his letter of dedication to Arsène Houssaye when, referring to his decision to venture into an anthology of poems in prose, he identifies the city of Paris as his inspiration. He contends that only a poetry that lapses into prose could be adequate to the historical experience of the big city. As Ross Chambers asks in 'Croisements ou la fange de macadam' (Chambers in Murphy

2014, p.64), 'Le poète a-t-il le droit, à la manière d'un Théophile Gautier, de fermer ses vitres à l'orage et de faire de l'art pour l'art, ... grâce aux ressources des vers et de la rime? Ou bien, faut-il essayer d'inventer une poésie de témoignage ...?'

In the *Salon de 1846* Baudelaire writes:

Avant de rechercher quel peut être le côté épique de la vie moderne, et de prouver par des exemples que notre époque n'est pas moins féconde que les anciennes en motifs sublimes, on peut affirmer que puisque tous les siècles et tous les peuples ont eu leur beauté, nous avons inévitablement la nôtre. Cela est dans l'ordre (*OCII*, p.493).

This seems an unambiguous statement that his poetry should be embedded in 'earthly time' and that he *does* feel an obligation to produce poems which are representative of his own epoch. Again, in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, widely taken to be a self-reflexive essay justifying Baudelaire's own work, as well as discussing the paintings of his chosen painters, he contends that each epoch has its own distinct way of being, and that the artist has to capture the modernity of his own epoch. Further to that, he believes it is futile to try to capture the beauty of the present using the methods of the past. Bénédicte Élie contends that the challenge for Baudelaire was to match the epics of the past using the prose of the modern world:

Il réactualise le genre épique en l'inscrivant dans la prose du monde moderne. Les héros ne sont plus les preux chevaliers, les généraux, les fondateurs d'empire et les législateurs ..., mais le misérable et le paria, tout ce qui est faible, ruiné, contristé, orphelin. Le héros moderne est le criminel, le catin, le dandy, la petite vieille ratatinée, la vieille femelle.

(Elie in Murphy 2014, p.184)

Epics of the past were either concerned with combat (as in Homer's *Iliad*), or with adventure (as in the *Odyssey*). Elie contends that Baudelaire recognises the inadequacy of the classical epic in relation to the modern world. He re-animates it, but rather than giving it a sense of unity, the overall impression is one of dissonance. Baudelaire's epic is characterised by paradox and contradiction: 'La grandeur de Baudelaire est d'être le témoin d'une nostalgie de l'unité et d'avoir dans le même temps conscience des dissonances du monde moderne' (Elie in Murphy 2014, p.193).

Modernity's version of combat comes in the form of 'Le Gâteau' wherein the poet describes an idyllic journey to the countryside with the familiar signs of peacefulness, like the shadow of a cloud passing across the sky, the distant sound of cow-bells, and the black lake, still and deep. Far from the vulgar passions of everyday living, the voyager is at peace with himself, and with the universe. In a typically Baudelairian reversal of mood – leading to a 'soubresaut

de conscience' in the reader - the peaceful tranquillity of the scene is violently transformed when he takes out his refreshments, which includes a loaf of bread. As he slices the loaf he sees before him a young ruffian whose eyes seemed to devour the slice of bread, and who utters the word, 'gâteau'. The laughing voyager offers a slice to the boy who snatches it from him. Instantly, he is set on by another boy, who the traveller takes to be his twin brother, and a hideous fight ensues. This is clearly not the honourable combat of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. It is the combat of greed and envy which represents the original sin of both combatants. The fact that they are young does not absolve them of guilt. Indeed, they are closer to the state of original sin than are adults.

Baudelaire's poetry of modernity starts from the concept that man is born evil, and that claims of the natural goodness of man as expressed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Europe (Scott 2005, pp.81-82) and the Transcendentalists, like Emerson, in America (whom Poe opposed), are naïve and wrong (Isaak 2020, p.85).

The evil demonstrated in 'Le Gâteau' arises from the spontaneous reaction of the boy to the sight of something to eat. Equally, his brother's envy is understandable, if not to be condoned. This evil is manifested on a conscious and exteriorised level within a Christian framework. Likewise, the evil in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is manifested externally, as in 'Le Crépuscule du Soir', where the

onset of darkness signals the start of work for the prostitutes and the criminals. Yet in Baudelaire's later prose poems, the evil is manifested *internally* in the mind of the protagonist. In 'Mademoiselle Bistouri', for example, the narrator is accosted by a prostitute who has an obsession with sex and surgery. She insists, despite his denials, that he must be a doctor and that he accompany her to her dwelling. There he finds the walls adorned with photographs of surgeons, some of whose stories she recounts, but she is unable to tell him the origin of her obsession. The narrator is interested not in what she does, but why she does it. Evidently, the focus in this prose poem is on the motivation for the crime rather than the crime itself, and it seems reasonable to conclude that this change of emphasis is linked to Baudelaire's translation of Poe's short stories like 'The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Imp of the Perverse' and 'The Black Cat', all of which feature protagonists with psychological problems which determine their evil behaviour. Poe describes their mental problems with such clarity and detail that some commentators like Marie Bonaparte have argued that he anticipated the psychological theories of Freud in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bonaparte 1933). It is this focus on the protagonist's psychology that constitutes one of the main pillars of Poe's modernity. His fascination with psychology is evident also in 'The Purloined Letter' where the letter is hidden

in plain sight, and in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' in which Roderick Usher's madness is portrayed in detail.

The inspiration for prose poems like 'Mademoiselle Bistouri' comes from Baudelaire's experiences as a flâneur on the streets of Paris, his wanderings enabling him to gain insights into the life of the city. The observations he made were not on the grand scale, but often consisted of a glimpse of a figure, or an interaction between figures, from which his imagination could construct an entire poem. Scott Carpenter likens the process to the method of a paleontologist who, finding an ancient tooth or a splinter of bone, is able to reconstruct an impression of the whole animal as it was. For the poet, however, the imagined reconstruction takes the form of an allegory (Carpenter in Murphy 2014, p.205). Such a reconstruction takes place in the prose poem, 'Les Fenêtres', in which the author sees, through a closed window, the figure of an old woman. He sees only her face, her clothes and her gesture of leaning over an unseen object, but from this he constructs a myth which he imagines to be her life-story. The allegory hinges on the fact that the window is closed. On the face of it, the scene portrayed is independent of the window being open or closed since it is, of course, transparent, but the allegorical message is that one can look at the window and, at the same time, see oneself and what is hidden behind it. For Hiddleston, writing in 1987:

The window is the perfect symbol, bringing together inside and outside, dream and reality, self and non-self, and the spectacle, thus perceived, becomes for the poet a means of self-exploration... It seems as though in many of the prose poems Baudelaire is viewing the scenes of Paris through such a transforming window (Hiddleston 1987, p.29).

Carpenter, in his interpretation of the poem in 2014, contends that the observer sees the window (the surface) and, at the same time, what is hidden behind it. In this double perception two objects can have the same form even if their meanings are diametrically opposed. At the end of the poem, the narrator speculates that the reader may be asking the question, “Est-tu sûr que cette légende soit vraie?” (*OCI*, p.339), aware that the reader will doubt the veracity of the old lady’s life-story as presented by the poet. The poet, himself, supplies the answer which is, ‘Qu’importe...?’. In other words, whether the reader chooses to accept the poet’s story is beside the point. It is important only that they are conscious of the choice and that they are aware of the uncertainty (Carpenter in Murphy 2014, p.208).

In a similar reconstruction the glimpse of a veteran fairground performer provides the inspiration for ‘Le Vieux Saltimbanque’ (*OCI*, p.295). Recalling Poe’s observation in ‘The Man of the Crowd’ (*WLC*, p.210), that ‘I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long

years', the narrator's vision is focused on 'un pauvre saltimbanque' as he stands propped up against one of the supporting posts of his lean-to. He is described as decrepit – a ruin of a man projecting an image of absolute misery. In contrast to the cries and the joy and the tumult of the crowd, the 'saltimbanque' neither laughs nor sings nor gesticulates. He simply gazes at the crowd with a look that the poet finds unforgettable. On the strength of this observation alone, the poet concludes that the 'saltimbanque's' time has passed – that he has given up, and his fate is sealed. In this case the allegorical message is made clear at the end of the poem. The 'saltimbanque' is 'le vieil homme de lettres', the poet, who has outlived his generation and now, without friends, family and children, is left with the public's ingratitude (Hiddleston 1987, p.13).

This empathy with the down-trodden of society is a constant theme in *Le Spleen de Paris*. In the prose poem, 'Les Veuves', the poet finds himself in a public park in which a crowd of people are listening to a concert. The paying public, the rich, are enclosed near the orchestra but the non-paying public, the hoi-polloi, have to be satisfied with snatches of music reaching the exterior. The poet is struck by the vision of a widow in mourning who has the majestic bearing of the aristocratic beauties of the past, but chooses to stand with the common herd, in which she looks out of place. It is the sight of her holding the

hand of a child which leads the poet to surmise that she has sacrificed the entry price for the sake of buying the child a toy, or other superfluous object, to satisfy their childish needs, albeit in the knowledge that the child is incapable of comforting her in the pain of her loneliness and loss. Her solitariness is interpreted by Hiddleston as 'an allegorical figure of loneliness and disproportion' (Hiddleston 1987, p.34). In such examples Baudelaire is not content simply to *describe* the majestic widow, the old lady behind the window, or the 'saltimbanque'. Rather, his identification with each is so intense that he *becomes* the other, as does Poe's narrator in 'The Man of the Crowd'. In his prose poem, 'Les Foules', Baudelaire writes, 'Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu'il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui' (*OCl*, p.291). He adopts the profession, the joys, and the miseries of each individual in the crowd.

If Baudelaire's aesthetic modernity largely rests on his observations of Paris and its inhabitants it seems paradoxical to state that he was temperamentally anti-modern. Yet he was resistant to many of the aspects of mid-nineteenth century living that could be described as progress. The most obvious change in the city was that brought about by Haussmann's urban renewals which Baudelaire felt had changed the character of the city. In 'Le Cygne' his nostalgia is evident as he laments, 'Le vieux Paris n'est plus' (*OCl*, p.85), but it

is also true that these renovations set the scene for some of his most famous prose poems. For instance, 'Les Yeux des Pauvres' (*OCI*, p.317) describes the wonder felt by a poor family when looking through the window of a restaurant in which the well-to-do bourgeoisie are dining. The scene probably resulted from the demolition of slum dwellings to be replaced by more affluent housing, and the consequent throwing together of the rich and the poor.

Baudelaire was strongly opposed to bourgeois materialism where progress was made in the name of capital enterprise to the detriment of the workers who lived on subsistence wages. He deplored 'la diminution progressive de l'âme et la domination progressive de la matière' (*OCII*, p.616). It turned him against the bourgeoisie and towards Proudhon's socialism, at least temporarily. The disdain he felt for the bourgeoisie was also the result of identifying himself with the aristocracy in terms of clothes and furniture, and especially with respect to art and literature. His prose poem 'Assommons les pauvres!' (*OCI*, p.357) is a satire on the hypocritical bourgeoisie (see Chapter 2). This gulf between the classes is a feature of other prose poems like 'Le Joujou du pauvre' (*OCI*, p.304) and 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' (*OCI*, p.285).

Baudelaire also shared with Poe an ambivalence towards the press. Both were dependent on the newspapers and magazines for publishing their work and for broadcasting their work to a (minority) discerning public, but they were

also resistant to the practice of producing hack work, preferred by the journals who targeted a mass readership with a thirst for entertainment. This inevitably led to a lowering in standards. These competing pressures often led to friction between both authors and their editors with whom they maintained difficult relationships. Both were sensitive to any editorial changes made to their work but both recognised that their livelihoods were at stake. (In a forthright letter to one editor Baudelaire concedes the right to omit a whole piece of his work if the editor feels it necessary, but forbids absolutely the omission of a particular comma *within* the work since it constitutes an essential part of the author's design - Compagnon 2014, p.53). The pressure to meet deadlines and, at the same time, to preserve the quality of their work, was a constant problem. The trepidation the narrator felt on hearing a knock at the door in 'La Chambre Double', is palpable as he speculates that, amongst other possibilities, it could be 'le saute-ruisseau d'un directeur de journal qui réclame la suite du manuscrit' (*OCI*, p.281).

In Baudelaire's opinion the decline in the level of literature brought about by the press was matched by the deterioration in the standard of painting as a result of the invention of photography. Having criticised the 'paysagistes' for their striving to produce faithful copies of scenes without recourse to imagination (and to the approbation of the general public), there was now a

method of producing exact copies using photography. He contended that by eliminating the element of imagination entirely, the photographer was thereby guilty of contributing to the impoverishment of French artistic genius.

Baudelaire blames the 'multitude' for confusing real art with industry, photography being a part of the latter:

S'il est permis à la photographie de suppléer l'art dans quelques-unes de ses fonctions, elle l'aura bientôt supplanté ou corrompu tout à fait, grâce à l'alliance naturelle qu'elle trouvera dans la sottise de la multitude. Il faut donc qu'elle rentre dans son véritable devoir, qui est d'être la servante des sciences et des arts... (*OCII*, p.618).

It is in this context of a natural resistance to modernity that Baudelaire is now considered to be a major contributor to modernity. Although he opposed the changes to the city brought about by Haussmann, they gave him inspiration for the 'Le Cygne' and for 'Les Yeux des pauvres'; he was contemptuous of the bourgeoisie's desire for material progress, but class conflict was at the heart of several of his prose poems like 'Assommons les pauvres!' and 'Le Vin des Chiffonniers'; both Baudelaire and Poe had difficult relationships with the press, but both were dependent on the press to reach their audience; Baudelaire was a fierce opponent of the photographic industry and yet, to this day, the photographic portraits of Baudelaire taken by his

friend Nadar, are recognisable to all readers of nineteenth-century French literature. In brief, although he was opposed to progress, he was compelled to engage with it, and many of his finest poems are a result of the tension thereby created. In the words of Antoine Compagnon, referring to *Le Spleen de Paris*, 'Aucun autre texte du poète n'illustre mieux sa résistance à la modernité...inhérente à sa modernité' (Compagnon 2014, p.13).

The origins of *Le Spleen de Paris* can be traced from Baudelaire's verse poems in the traditional format to those adopting an increasingly non-conformist style (in the *Tableaux parisiens*), and then to the flagrantly anti-establishment prose poems. A chronology of publications is available (Hiddleston 1987, p.114), but this gives little guide as to the particular time of inspiration, period of gestation, re-working of the material or, most importantly, of the poet's mindset at any point in that calendar. Yet, the fifty prose poems comprising *Le Spleen de Paris* lie at the heart of Baudelaire's contribution to modernity, so the story of their development is critical to its understanding.

Although it is generally agreed that Baudelaire played a leading role in the establishment of the prose poem as a genre (Hiddleston 1987), it is also important to recognise that in the preceding century two complementary movements had helped to establish the conditions which were propitious for

such a change (Gouvard 2014, pp.44-45). On the one hand it was a time when rationality was in the ascendancy, favouring forms of literary expression other than poetry, such as the novel, the short story, rhetoric, drama and comedy. Versification, therefore, underwent some criticism throughout the century and the idea that you could be a poet without holding to the formal signs of poetry, and, significantly, without obeying the traditional rules of verse, gained some currency. On the other hand, the increased communication between countries of different languages meant that verse poems were often translated into prose because it was difficult to reconstitute them in a different system of versification. The combined effect of these influences was a gradual uncoupling in people's minds of poetry and verse. By the time of Baudelaire's emergence, therefore, there had been a certain relaxation in the rule that poetry was the preserve of verse. He was also aware that Edgar Allan Poe had written a semi-scientific, semi-intuitive treatise on the nature of the universe called *Eureka*, accompanied by the subtitle, *A Prose Poem*.

As with many aspects of Baudelaire's worldview the change from verse poems to prose poems came about despite his tenacious attachment to established norms which he willingly endorsed. His commitment to the strict rules of art is encapsulated in his statement in the 'Salon de 1859', that 'l'un des plus grands vices de l'esprit ... est la désobéissance opiniâtre aux règles

constitutives de l'art.' By this he meant 'art' in the general sense and he goes on to ask, 'Quel cerveau bien portant peut concevoir sans horreur une peinture en relief, une sculpture agitée par la mécanique, une ode sans rimes, un roman versifié, etc?' (*OCII*, p.674). Evidently, therefore, at this stage in his career, Baudelaire's view was that formal boundaries were there to be observed. In his own field of poetry, the dominant conventional metre was the classical alexandrine, and his early work adhered to this form. This is true of many of his early couplet poems of the 1840s. Amongst these, 'Le Crépuscule du matin' (*OCI*, p.103) and 'Le Vin des Chiffonniers' (*OCI*, p.106), of which the first versions were written before 1843, exemplify the conformist style which is natural for a young poet, yet to attain the maturity required for pioneering experimentation.

This conservative position was maintained in 'L'Art philosophique', in which he contends 'que tout art doit se suffire à lui-même et en même temps rester dans les limites providentielles', the latter term referring to the 'heaven-sent' parameters to which painting has to conform (*OCII*, p.604). Baudelaire reserves much of his ire for 'les éclectiques', who, in his opinion, do not realise that 'l'attention humaine est d'autant plus intense qu'elle est bornée et qu'elle limite elle-même son champ d'observations' (*OCII*, p.473). His belief was that, in painting, *coloristes* should not invade the territory of *dessinateurs* (ie

specialists in line) and that, by extension, since he believed in the fundamental equivalence of all forms of art, verse and prose should be quite separate forms of literature. Yet, despite his protestations, he was compelled to acknowledge the success that the artist, Ingres, had achieved as a *coloriste* in daring to venture from his established and well-respected position as a *dessinateur*. His approval of the artist's transgression is grudging. He damns Ingres's efforts with faint praise ('Le résultat, non pas toujours discordant' – *OCII*, p.459) and never claims an affinity with the artist as he did with Poe, but Chesters (1988, p.148) feels that Baudelaire's protestations of sacrilege by Ingres betray a suggestion that he, himself, might be tempted to transgress.

Similarly, in the field of literature, Baudelaire admired the heroism of Poe in attempting to write 'des contes purement poétiques' (*OCII*, p.330), but yet again, Baudelaire's praise is lukewarm. He describes Poe's attempts as 'souvent heureux', but ultimately concludes that "ces tentations héroïques vinssent d'un désespoir" (*OCII*, p.330). In the *Salon de 1859* (*OCII*, p.644), he recommends that authors choose their genre *with severity*, bearing in mind that the freedom of *la poésie en prose* has its dangers, just like any other absolute freedom. He considers it imperative that the poet maintain a 'discipline' in writing prose poems, as they would in writing verse poems. In a letter written to Arsène Houssaye in 1861 he recognises two traps the writer of

prose poems must be aware of – that they must not resemble a preliminary sketch of a verse poem, and that they must not lapse into *la prose poétique* (Compagnon 2014, p.24). It is clear from this letter that the future champion of modernity is firmly rooted in the traditions of the past, whilst feeling himself irrevocably drawn to the examples of modernity demonstrated by his contemporaries. Baudelaire was a modernist despite himself.

One of the first indications of this modernity was evident in the verse poem, ‘Le Crépuscule du soir’ (*OCI*, p.94 - 1855 version), where Baudelaire employs a unique frequency of enjambment. This, in itself, marks out the originality of the poem, but the effect is accentuated by a series of ‘unusual rhythmic devices’ which disrupt the symmetry of his earlier Classical model. For instance, Baudelaire deliberately uses weak rhymes, as in ‘celui/Aujourd’hui’, when the general tendency at the time was towards ‘rich’ rhymes (Chesters 1988, p.155). Combined with visual effects like the innovations in typography, the overall impression is of a greater dissonance, greater disorderliness, and general lack of symmetry, which had hitherto been seen as marks of an inferior kind of verse. The poem is clearly attempting to throw off the shackles of accepted rules of versification, and the explanation for this is contained in his dedication to Arsène Houssay, in which he claims, ‘C’est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c’est du croisement de

leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant' (*OCI*, p.276). Clearly, his activities as a flâneur in the city of Paris have brought him to the conclusion that the various incidents he has witnessed, and the thoughts that they have inspired, can no longer be satisfactorily expressed by the traditional, constricting poems of the past. As a consequence, the experimental innovations inspired by the city would lead eventually to his ground-breaking volume, *Le Spleen de Paris*, but in a letter sent in 1859 to the publisher of *Revue Française* accompanying a manuscript of his verse poem, 'Les Sept Vieillards', he already claims "d'avoir simplement réussi à dépasser les limites assignées à la Poésie" (Compagnon 2014, p.201). The movement from verse to prose in the years between the two publications of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857 and 1861 was therefore contemporaneous with a new kind of verse poem, for which the city of Paris was the inspiration.

'Les limites assignées à la Poésie' could refer to the theme of the poem, the content or the imagery, but a primary measure of his self-proclaimed success is contained in the poem's versification. 'Le Crépuscule du soir' (*OCI*, p.94) had already become known for its frequency of enjambments in the rhymed couplets of its classical alexandrines, but Baudelaire had extended this practice to the enjambment between stanzas in 'Les Sept Vieillards', as in the last line of the fourth stanza and the first line of the fifth:

Tout à coup, un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes,
Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux,
Et dont l'aspect aurait fait pleuvoir les aumônes,
Sans la méchanceté qui luisait dans ses yeux,

M'apparut. On eût dit sa prunelle trempée (*OCI*, p.87)

Not only is there a stanzaic enjambment but the sentence beginning 'Tout à coup, un vieillard...', is not completed until the first line of the next stanza with the words 'M'apparut'.

A similar strategy is apparent in 'Le Cygne' where the poet notices a swan which has escaped from its cage near the new Carrousel du Louvre. It is first mentioned in the fifth stanza:

Un cygne que s'était évadé de sa cage,
Et, de ses pieds palmés frottant le pavé sec,
Sur le sol raboteux traînait son blanc plumage.
Près d'un ruisseau sans eau la bête ouvrant le bec

Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre,

Et disait, le coeur plein de son beau lac natal:

“Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu? quand tonneras-tu, foudre?” (*OCI*,
p.86)

Again, the stanzaic enjambment is accompanied by a dramatic delay between the action of the swan, ‘ouvrant le bec’ (in the last line of the fifth stanza), and the emerging utterance, which is only made known in the third line of the next.

These stanzaic enjambments demonstrate a technical ‘dépassement’ in that they go beyond the traditional and well-established limits of the alexandrine, but they also represent an aesthetic ‘dépassement’ in the sense that they infringed the limits of poetry at that time.

A similar effect can be seen in ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ where there is a stanzaic enjambment linking the last line of the fourth stanza and the first line of the fifth:

Où se pend un Démon sans pitié! Tout cassés

Qu’ils sont, ils ont des yeux perçants comme une vrille, (*OCI*, p.89)

Chesters notes that these stanzaic enjambments occur only in these three poems belonging to the *Tableaux parisiens* (published in 1859), and are completely absent in the quatrain poems of the same era which do not relate

to Paris (Chesters 1988, p.160). The implication is that Baudelaire is adapting style to subject-matter as he matures as a poet. It seems that life in the modern city, as it is depicted in *Les Tableaux parisiens*, evokes ideas which are too convulsive to be satisfactorily represented by conventional verse, and that the technical advances which are described above prepare the ground for an even more daring development in the form of the prose poems. As Chesters points out, their significance lies in the fact that they allow Baudelaire to breach the technical barrier between verse and prose, rather than the thematic one between the poetic and the prosaic (Chesters 1988, p.151). Breaching the thematic barrier was a greater challenge, and one which required the influence of other poets, such as Aloysius Bertrand, with his publication of *Gaspard de la nuit*, a compilation of prose poems published in 1842.

An indication of Baudelaire's preference for the urban theme is contained in his response to a request in 1855 to contribute to a *Festschrift* in homage to Claude-François Denecourt, the guardian of the forest of Fontainebleau. He was asked to make a contribution on the theme of Nature, but he actually sent two verse poems and two prose poems, none of which related to the stated request. In fact, Baudelaire used the opportunity to air his views on the 'Religion nouvelle' (Compagnon 2014, p.215) of Nature in a letter he sent to

Fernand Desnoyers who was compiling a slim volume on the topic as part of the homage. In the letter he mocks 'cette singulière Religion nouvelle' and claims to be 'incapable de m'attendrir sur les végétaux', concluding that 'je ne croirai jamais que l'âme des Dieux habite dans les plantes'. His deliberate flouting of the terms of the homage was, according to Compagnon (2014, p.215), a recognition that 'l'expérience de la grande ville pouvait donner lieu à une griserie aussi sublime que le spectacle de la nature' (Compagnon 2014, p.213). This is not to say that Baudelaire was incapable of evocative poems in which nature plays a prominent role (such as his description of the Pyrenees in *Le Gâteau*), but that he rebelled against the conception of Nature with a capital 'N' which carried with it an association of noble emotions. On the contrary, he felt that 'il y avait dans la *Nature*, florissante et rajeunie, quelque chose d'affligeante, de dur, de cruel,...' (Compagnon 2014, p.216).

As well as allowing Baudelaire the opportunity of venting his spleen on the new religion of Nature the *Festschrift* also gave him a platform for launching his ground-breaking poems which he knew would have a ready-made audience of poets and writers. He contributed the two verse poems, 'Le Crépuscule du soir' (at that time entitled 'Le Soir') and 'Le Crépuscule du matin' ('Le Matin') as well as the prose poems, 'Le Crépuscule du soir' and 'La Solitude'. These poems were firmly anchored in an urban setting and provide a valuable

opportunity for comparing a prose poem, 'Le Crépuscule du soir', with its verse antecedent of the same title. Chesters (1988, p.157) quotes Marcel Ruff who observes that both poems start from the same standpoint, that of comparing the effects of evening twilight on different characters, but then detects a divergence both in the themes of the poems and in the formal poetic characteristics of each. It is as if Baudelaire is experimenting to see what variations can be drawn from the same initial theme, according to the two different treatments. For instance, Baudelaire paragraphed his verses by indenting the first lines to give the impression of prose. In the prose version of the poem the paragraphs are consistently of such a length as to resemble stanzas, and some sentences mimic the rhythm of verse, as in the phrase, 'plus aigre, plus sombre, plus taquin'. In addition, the antithetical balance of 'Indulgent pendant la journée, il était impitoyable le soir' (*OCI*, p.311) is reminiscent of verse. However, despite these ventures into lyricism, the prose poem *remains* a piece of prose and can therefore accommodate a greater range of ideas, such as that of the customer hurling a cooked chicken at the maître d'hôtel, an incident which is unsurprisingly absent from the verse poem. It is therefore possible to identify a two-way form of trespass of prose into verse - where the weak rhymes and enjambments lean towards prose - and of verse into prose with such sentences as 'L'ombre qui fait la lumière

dans mon esprit fait la nuit dans le leur', the rhythm of which would not be out of place in a verse poem (Chesters 1988, p.167).

The prose poem, 'Le Crépuscule du soir' (*OCI*, p.311) is worth analysing in depth because of the number of publications it had, and because it underwent a major re-working almost seven years after its first publication. Its origin in the verse poem of the same name provides a useful means of tracing the development of Baudelaire from that of a poet firmly committed to the traditional rules of versification, into a more flexible exponent of the couplet-verse, and subsequently to the author of *Le Spleen de Paris*. In his 1862 version of the prose poem Baudelaire added three introductory paragraphs to the 1855 version, as well as two concluding paragraphs, and made some significant changes to those already in the original. One of those changes was to widen the gap between different tones, as in his addition of the phrase, 'dans lequel il croyait voir je ne sais quel insultant hiéroglyphe', to the original sentence, 'Je l'ai vu jeter à la tête d'un maître d'hôtel un excellent poulet' (*OCI*, p.311), which accentuates the burlesque tone of the line. (Could it be that this later addition owed something to his reading of the humorous tales of Poe, such as 'How to write a Blackwood article' (*WLC*, p.310) in which Poe recommends writing an article about being choked to death by a chicken bone?). Chesters contrasts this line with the lyricism, three paragraphs later, of 'Ô nuit! ô

raffaîchissantes ténèbres! vous êtes pour moi le signal d'une fête intérieur, vous êtes la délivrance d'une angoisse!' (*OCI*, p.312). He concludes that Baudelaire had achieved a striking contradiction of tones, hardly possible in a verse poem (Chesters 1988, pp. 162-170).

This clash of tones was seen by Bernard (1959 cited in Chesters 1988, pp.162-163) as evidence of an awkward grafting of one poem on to another, but Chesters refutes this criticism and sees it more positively as a deliberate polarisation of the burlesque and the lyric. In his opinion it is Baudelaire's intention to seek out this kind of contrast in order to create within the reader a 'soubresaut de la conscience', and to give expression to the disharmony of modern man, subject to the spleen and stridency of life in a vast modern capital. In the search for this disharmony Baudelaire emphasises the prosaic quality of his prose poems. The realism and 'truth' of his subject-matter require a different medium from verse, which, however much one may disrupt its rhythms, by enjambment and by shifting the caesura, always returns to some kind of harmony, no matter how unsure, with the regular completion of the even line – octosyllable, decasyllable, alexandrine – together with the inevitable and reassuring return of the rhyme (Hiddleston 1987, p.75). In Gouvard's estimation:

Cela explique que, à de très rares exceptions près, les pièces du *Spleen de Paris* ne présentent pas de formes qui évoquent le vers, la strophe ou les rimes. Il fallait, pour qu'ils soient des 'poèmes en prose' que les poèmes du *Spleen* aient l'air d'être vraiment de la prose, et non de la prose versifiée. (Gouvard 2014, p.46)

In a similar vein, Chesters is aware that the criticism of a clash of tones has been directed at the 'fine, expansive poetry' of the last two added paragraphs of the prose poem, 'Le Crépuscule du soir', in that they deserve 'more impressive harbingers' in the preceding paragraphs (Chesters 1988, p.169). But he suggests this criticism overlooks the importance which Baudelaire attached to contrasting the more anecdotal sections of the poem with those that are highly lyrical in order to intensify their effect. 'The 'weak' lines are redeemed and given their function retrospectively by the success of the strong lines'. In Chesters (1988, pp.169-170) view, 'The moving lyricism of the conclusion resolves all dissonances and persuades the reader to accept the switches of direction'. The poem concludes: 'et les étoiles vacillantes d'or et d'argent, dont elle est semée, représentent ces feux de la fantaisie qui ne s'allument bien que sous le deuil profond de la Nuit' (*OCl*, p.312). These concluding words express perfectly Baudelaire's feeling that the background of deliberately banal content in a prose poem, is essential to set in greater relief his more expressive

lines. It is by this means that Baudelaire achieves 'l'unité dans l'impression, de la totalité de l'effet'. Whatever the source of his inspiration or 'l'unité dans la conception', it is the overall impression on the reader which is the measure of success of the poem (*OCII*, p.329).

In comparing the verse poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* with their 'pendants' in prose form it is noticeable that in the prose version, by virtue of an increase in detail and elaboration, the effect is to weaken or banalise the content, in an attempt to create a muted and featureless style. This can be illustrated by the sections of 'Du Vin et du Hachisch' in which prose versions of the verse poems 'L'Ame du vin' (*OCI*, p.105) and 'Le Vin des Chiffonniers' (*OCI*, p.106) are incorporated. This latter verse poem maintains a traditional alexandrine form of four-lined verse without any enjambment. The poem opens with the lines:

Souvent, à la clarté rouge d'un réverbère,

Dont le vent bat la flamme et tourmente le verre,

.....

On voit un chiffonnier qui vient hochant la tête,

Butant, et se cognant aux murs comme un poète,

.....

This is transposed into the following section of 'Du vin et du hachisch' (*OCl*, p.381) as:

Le voici qui, à la clarté sombre des réverbères tourmentés par le vent de la nuit, remonte une des longues rues tortueuses et peuplées de petits ménages de la montagne Sainte-Geneviève. Il est revêtu de son *châle d'osier avec son numéro sept*. Il arrive hochant la tête et butant sur les pavés, comme les jeunes poètes qui passent toutes leurs journées à errer et à chercher des rimes.

The latter prose version is more intimately and directly linked to real experience. It describes the characteristic appearance of the 'chiffonnier', 'revêtu de son châle d'osier avec son numéro sept' (the tool he uses to pick up the rags), which is absent in the verse poem; it places him in a particular named setting in 'une des longues rues tortueuses de la montagne Sainte-Geneviève....' and likens the action of the 'chiffonnier' in 'hochant la tête et butant sur les pavés' to the activity of the poet 'à errer et à chercher des rimes'. Baudelaire has avoided any prosodic regularity or rhyme which might give the prose the affectation of a pleasing sound. He is affirming that it is possible to be a poet without recourse to the formal marks of 'poéticité' which regulate the language of verse. This radical change in form brings us back to the question asked by Hiddleston (1987, p.86), 'Why call them poems at all?'

Jean-Luc Steinmetz sheds some light on this question by examining the methods Baudelaire used to convert some of his verse poems into prose (Steinmetz in Murphy 2014, pp.101-104). Using as his example, 'Le Vin du Chiffonnier', and its transposition into the essay entitled, 'Du vin et du haschich', Steinmetz contends that:

l'ambition n'est pas d'insuffler le ton ni les tours de la poésie dans la prose; il s'agit, à l'inverse, de défaire un poème qu'il accède au régime de la prose, non sans soupçonner (voire espérer ou escompter) qu'il restera quelque chose de son état premier et que la prose dite courante en bénéficiera (Steinmetz in Murphy 2014, p.102).

In this case the process is one of deconstruction of the verse poem with the aim of reconstructing it in prose form, as opposed to creating something new. The poem then becomes viable in a different guise, often expanded by afterthoughts, not present in the original verse poem. The golden rule was to avoid the alexandrine by controlling the length of words, by the addition of adjectives and adverbs, or by ignoring the hiatus. The hope was that the prose poem would retain enough of the 'poéticité' of the lyric version to merit the term 'poem'. As a precedent this method proved to be too restrictive, so much so that, for other transformations of verse into prose, Baudelaire preferred

simply to preserve the spirit of the poem as well as some cherished phrases, too valuable to be discarded.

The transformation described above applies, of course, only to the prose poems which were a direct 'pendant' to a verse poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It is more difficult to identify what exactly it is about the prose poems which do not form part of a doublet, that makes them poems. The fact that they are short was felt to be a necessary criterion, in that their brevity is conducive to an intensity of effect. Baudelaire preferred short poems to epic poems for the same reason that he admired Poe's short stories. He felt that the epic was unable to stir 'cette excitation... cet enlèvement de l'âme' (*OCII*, p.332) which was more likely to be brought about by a short poem. Their shortness, of course, is no *guarantee* of effectiveness, but Bernard (1959 cited in Hiddleston 1987, p.87), identifies three other essential characteristics of the prose poems – gratuité, mystère and densité – all of which contribute to their 'poéticité'.

The gratuité in style of writing is exemplified by the use of *apparently* throwaway phrases such as 'il y a seize ou dix-sept ans' in 'Assommons les pauvres!' (*OCI*, p.357) which is, in fact, crucial to the sense of the poem as it sets the time of the event during the 1848 revolution. At the very end of the same poem the line, 'Qu'en dis-tu, Citoyen Proudhon?' appears in the manuscript form of the poem but does not appear in the posthumously

published form of the text, and it remains unknown whether Baudelaire sanctioned this removal or not. Its presence in the original reads like an afterthought, but it is significant because it makes reference to the socialist views of Proudhon to which Baudelaire formerly gave his allegiance, but ultimately renounced. Perhaps Baudelaire's executors considered this throwaway line to be too much of a politically sensitive sting in the tale. There is a less controversial throwaway line in 'Les Dons des Fées', where the narrator mentions that, '*J'ai oublié de vous dire que la distribution, en ces cas solennels, est sans appel, et qu'aucun don ne peut être refusé*' (OCI, p.306 - my italics). This statement makes clear that the gifts bestowed by the fairies on the children are irrevocable and so is vitally important to the sense of the poem. Yet the information is casually revealed to the reader as late as the tenth paragraph. Again, in 'La Corde', the narrator almost forgets to mention a popular axiom referring to suicide by hanging, without which the poem would lose much of its sense:

J'ai négligé de vous dire que j'avais vivement appelé au secours; mais tous mes voisins avaient refusé de me venir en aide, fidèles en cela aux habitudes de l'homme civilisé, qui ne veut jamais, je ne sais pourquoi, se mêler des affaires d'un pendu (OCI, p.330 – my italics).

The term gratuité can also be applied to the sudden violent episodes which are a feature of several of the prose poems, the most notable of which is the action of the bourgeois city-dweller in dropping a plant pot on the unsatisfactory glass seller in 'Le Mauvais Vitrier'. Equally, the wanton aggression of the narrator on the beggar in 'Assommons les pauvres!' seems to have no valid cause. Gratuitous violence is also a feature of 'Le Gâteau' and 'Une mort héroïque', and in all these cases it is used as a turning point in the poem, reminiscent of the gratuitous violence perpetrated by the narrators of 'The Black Cat', 'The Imp of the Perverse' and 'The Tell-tale Heart', short stories by Poe with which Baudelaire was familiar, and which he admired.

The concept of 'densité' comes closest to capturing the essence of the poéticité of the prose poems in *Le Spleen de Paris*. In part, this is achieved by an economy of expression in which every term he uses is essential to the overall effect. (Perhaps this style owes something to Poe's description of the composition of 'The Raven' in which he attaches great importance to being precise and succinct). Even the apparently gratuitous comments contained in the prose poems have a bearing on the dénouement. This economy of style is immediately evident in poems like 'Mademoiselle Bistouri' where the scene is set in one sentence:

Comme j'arrivais à l'extrémité du faubourg, sous les éclairs du gaz, je sentis un bras qui se coulait doucement sous le mien, et j'entendis une voix qui me disait à l'oreille: "Vous êtes médecin, monsieur?" (*OCI*, p.353).

In this introductory sentence the narrator establishes that he is being propositioned by a Parisian prostitute, and that she is likely to have an obsession with doctors. Much like a 'croquis' by Constantin Guys, whom Baudelaire eulogised in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, the picture becomes clear with the minimum of brush strokes. There is no redundancy of expression even though the genre permits of greater detail than the verse poems. This condensed style distinguishes it from the more discursive genres, like the novel, which might take pages to establish the scene and describe the characters. Huysmans recognised this characteristic in the 1880s when he concluded:

En un mot, le poème en prose représentait, pour des Esseintes, le suc concret, l'osmazone de la littérature, l'huile essentielle de l'art. Cette succulence développée et réduite en un goutte, elle existait déjà chez Baudelaire' (Huysmans in Hiddleston 1987, p.87).

The element of mystère also arises in 'Mademoiselle Bistouri' when, in connection with her fetish about surgery and doctors, the narrator asks her,

“Peux-tu te souvenir de l’époque et de l’occasion où est née en toi cette passion si particulière?” (*OCI*, p.355), but receives no satisfactory reply. The reader is left to contemplate the origins of her fixation with sex and surgery and to reconcile her sick imagination with her gentleness. Perhaps the mystery of her deranged mind owes something to that of Poe’s unbalanced narrators in his short stories, like ‘The Tell-tale Heart’ and ‘The Black Cat’, in which each of the protagonists has their own particular mental illness.

Apart from the obvious doublets in which the verse poem and the prose poem have the same title (as above in ‘Le Crépuscule du soir’) there are several pairings in which the same subject matter has been treated. Of the six *Poèmes nocturnes* published in 1857 in the *Revue Hebdomadaire de la Littérature et des Beaux-Arts*, four were prose versions of verse poems. Baudelaire’s use of the word ‘pendant’ with reference to the relationship of *Le Spleen de Paris* to *Les Fleurs du Mal* is not meant to be understood as ‘pendant’ in the sense of ‘calque’ or ‘reflet’ – ‘*Le Spleen* n’est pas la traduction en prose des *Fleurs*’. (Gouvard 2014, p.46). In fact, the public expectation that ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ (*OCI*, p.301) in its ‘pendant’ form (published in 1857) would bear such a close relationship to its antecedent in verse (*OCI*, p.53 - 1855) in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, met with disappointment (Johnson 1979, p.103).

The general response ranged from regret to indignation, the source of which can be illustrated by comparing the celebrated refrain in the verse poem:

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté.

Luxe, calme et volupté (*OCI*, p.53)

with the description in prose of 'un pays de Cocagne':

où le luxe a plaisir à se mirer dans l'ordre; où la vie est grasse et douce à respirer; d'où le désordre, la turbulence et l'imprévu sont exclus; où le bonheur est marié au silence; où la cuisine elle-même est poétique, grasse et excitante à la fois... (*OCI*, p.301)

For many readers the additions in the prose version were heterogeneous to the nature of the poem. A particular source of debate was the phrase, 'où la cuisine elle-même est poétique', which raises the question: Can something as banal as 'la cuisine' really be poetic? Johnson (1979, p.105) contends that it is not the status of the word 'cuisine' which is at issue, but the status of the word 'poétique'. For critics like Bernard (1959 in Johnson 1979, pp.105-106) "poétique = lyrique", which would seem to rule out 'la cuisine' in the poetic sense, but it was Baudelaire's very intention to convey a sense of realism and to change the definition of 'poétique' so that it included the prosaic. Just as the chicken-throwing incident produced a clash of tones in 'Le Crépuscule du soir',

so the inclusion of 'la cuisine' in 'L'Invitation au voyage' pushes back the boundaries of the word 'poétique'.

The question of what constitutes 'poéticité' is also raised in some of Baudelaire's verse poems of the same epoch. His sonnet, 'Recueillement' (*OCI*, p.140), was criticised by Valéry who found at least five of the lines 'd'une platitude incontestable' (Valéry 1924, p.27). For example, lines like 'Sous le fouet de Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci' could be considered banal because someone with a whip is likely to be a 'bourreau' and a 'bourreau' is likely to be 'sans merci'. Equally, the line "Ma douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici," has no central caesura and is prosaic. Yet, despite this apparent weakness Valéry conceded that the sonnet was one of the most charming pieces in the work:

Mais les premiers et les derniers vers de cette poésie sont d'une telle magie que le milieu ne fait pas sentir son ineptie et se tient aisément pour nul et inexistant. Il faut un très grand poète pour ce genre de miracles (Valéry 1924, p.27).

Could it be that the so-called 'inept' lines made an important contribution to the poem in spite of their apparent banality? Was Valéry guilty, perhaps, of not being able to see the wood for the trees? in the sense that these lines were designed to be deliberately unremarkable so that they could be set against the

more memorable lines in the sonnet's finale. It seems that Valéry has ignored this skill of intentional *gradation* which Baudelaire took many years to perfect and, once again, relates to 'l'unité d'impression, la *totalité* d'effet' for which Baudelaire was indebted to Poe (*OCII*, p.329).

None of the above marks of 'poéticité' would raise Baudelaire above the level of his contemporaries, but there is a further more fundamental characteristic of the prose poems which has that capacity, and that is the quality of hidden depth. It is the extent to which the poem can fascinate the reader with layers of meaning which go beyond its literal sense. Hiddleston (1987, p.88) regards this capacity to 'faire rêver' as the property of all great art. This might lead the reader to contemplate, for instance, the relationship between prostitution and innocence in 'Mademoiselle Bistouri', or the relationship between art and experience in 'La Corde'. Few of the poems confine themselves to explicit messages, like 'Le Chien et le flacon', in which the reading public is openly castigated by the author. For most of the prose poems, it is worth bearing in mind the words of the poet contained in 'Le Cygne', '... tout pour moi devient allégorie' (*OCI*, p.86). It is the for the reader to ponder on the allegories contained in *Le Spleen de Paris*.

CHAPTER 2

HOW DO THE READER, NARRATOR, AUTHOR AND EDITOR ENTER INTO DIALOGUE IN THE WORKS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE AND CHARLES BAUDELAIRE?

The literary output of both Poe and Baudelaire was determined, not only by their genius as authors, but also the roles played by other major actors. Firstly, the reading public and its capacity to understand their work in depth was of major importance – it was for their readers that they constructed ‘la totalité d’effet’. Secondly, the character of their narrators, including their reliability and mental stability, had a critical bearing on this effect. Lastly, the role of the editor was vital in approving only the kind of work which they felt would meet with a sympathetic audience. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the parts played by all four participants in the production of nineteenth-century literature which continues to be appreciated in the twenty-first century.

Edgar Allan Poe’s short life-span (1809-1849) coincided with a rapid growth in the production of weekly literary papers and intense magazine activity in America. ‘This is the golden age of periodicals!’ exclaimed one magazine in 1831 (Mott in Werner 2004, p.30). This upsurge in the press provided the

opportunity for Poe to make a living, but it also constrained the quality of his literary output. The editors of magazines were providing a commodity and needed to maximise their circulation in order to make a profit. Consequently, they were obliged to accommodate 'the limited cultural capital of less educated readerships' (Qoyeser in Werner 2004, p.36). The editor's role was crucial, in that nineteenth-century American magazines were forced to gauge public tastes, and to craft a commodity specifically designed to cater to such tastes, often to the detriment of the art-product itself. It was the editor's role, therefore, to persuade their contributing writers to produce pieces which would court the common reader rather than satisfy the more cerebral needs of a select few. The magazine needed to reflect a consistent editorial stance, catering for a clearly defined reader.

For Poe, there would be a weekly deadline to meet including authorial comment on political institutions. As Daniel Hoffman put it:

Being Edgar Poe, he didn't write ordinary journalism or set forth his withering views of the democratic dogma in the customary form. For to do so would be to compromise the originality of his own aristocratic genius with the very forms and thoughts designed by catchpenny scribblers to tickle the vulgar palate of that demagogic monster, the masses (Hoffman D. 1973, p.189).

Yet, according to Jerome McGann, 'The ethical and political significance of Poe's work follows from what the poet takes as his great subject: the reader' (McGann J. 2009, p.1). Although Poe was living in straitened circumstances, (Quinn A.H. 1998, p.306) he was unwilling to prostitute his talent to the more profitable production of hack work which was aimed at selling newspapers (Hoffman D. 1973, p.192).

As a magazine reader, writer and (briefly) editor, Poe was acutely conscious of this trend towards commodification in periodical publication, but was of necessity implicated in the process himself. Early in his career, he noted the upsurge in the popularity of magazines, and the increasing emphasis on short, neatly packaged and easily digestible articles. Typically, the reading public were receptive to sensationalism and certainly Poe was admirably capable of satisfying the demand. Yet his attitude toward these articles was ambivalent. On the one hand he was well aware that 'to be appreciated you must be read and these things are invariably sought after with avidity' (Ostrom in Werner 2004 p.42). On the other hand, he was conscious that, when the formulaic articles were produced by authors less gifted than himself, the results could be mediocre. One of his own tales, 'Berenice', concerns a narrator who becomes obsessed with his cataleptic sister's teeth, and thinking her dead, removes them during one of her fits. Poe acknowledged that 'the subject is by far too

horrible', but also that 'the history of all magazines shows plainly that those which have attained celebrity were indebted for it to articles *similar in nature*' (Werner 2004, p.42).

Several of Poe's other tales contain 'sensationalist' aspects. These include 'MS. Found in a Bottle', 'The Pit and the Pendulum', 'A Descent into the Maelstrom', as well as his novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Yet he also wrote spoof articles which mocked the genre mercilessly, such as 'How to write a Blackwood article' and 'Loss of Breath'. In the 'Blackwood' spoof (WLC, p.310) Poe refers to the use of a variety of tones (eg. didactic, enthusiastic, elevated, laconic, metaphysical...) which, although not an integral part of the tale, can be grafted on to subject matter to achieve different effects. For Poe, in these tales, meaning is not as important as the effect of feigned emotion or intellect. The various tones act as cues to the reader for a *programmed* response, a gesture that replaces genuine affect or philosophical speculation, but which satisfies the pretensions of the would-be intellectual writer and the reader. The article demonstrates clearly Poe's capacity for self-mockery, and suggests to his readers that it is worth taking his sincere articles with a generous pinch of salt.

Although Baudelaire lived and worked in a different historical and social context to Poe, their publishing environments showed remarkable similarities.

The editorial pressures under which Baudelaire worked had a critical influence on his literary output. In France successive governments - the monarchy of Louis-Phillipe then the deuxième Republique followed by the Second Empire – had perpetuated the growth of an influential middle class. This was characterised by bourgeois values like materialism and technological progress as well as conventional attitudes towards literature. Between 1852-1860 the authoritarian government held a firm grip on the press which was constrained by a desire not to transgress the laws of censorship applied by the government (Albert 1998 p.167). After 1860 the government recognised the need for reading material amongst ‘the popular classes’ and allowed ‘la naissance de la petite presse à cinq centimes’, but in which political articles were banned (Albert 1998 p.167). Budding authors were eager to reach the reading public but access to the public was controlled by newspaper editors who held positions of considerable power. It was in this atmosphere of tight control of the press that authors like Baudelaire sought to have their work published. His precarious financial situation determined that he must persuade editors to publish his work even when the political and literary ideologies of those editors were diametrically opposed to his own. The result of this was that he was forced to enter into painful negotiations, often leading to compromises which were humiliating and degrading. It was sometimes the case that he was

compelled to agree to drastic editing of his work before it could be published. On one occasion he found 'd'extraordinaires changements' had been made only *after* reading two of his prose poems as they appeared in the *Revue nationale et étrangère*. His response was to write to the editor with the instruction, 'Supprimez tout un morceau, si une virgule vous déplaît dans le morceau, mais ne supprime pas la virgule; elle a son raison d'être' (contained in a letter to the editor of the *Revue nationale et étrangère*, dated 20th June 1863, concerning the publication of 'La Belle Dorothée' - Compagnon 2014, p.53).

Arsène Houssaye was a classic example of the newspaper editor who had established himself as a powerful figure in cultural politics by toeing the party line. He was the archetypal bourgeois who chose order above all and backed the bourgeois government who maintained it. In 1862 Houssaye was the editor of *La Presse* and *L'Artiste* and had political aspirations. In the opinion of many authors of that era, he was the embodiment of cultural power but, as a poet himself, his work was considered to be 'un monument de médiocrité et de bavardage' (Brix in Murphy 2007, p.62). However, his publishing power meant that he was feared, and often flattered, by aspiring authors who were anxious to have him publish their work. Houssaye's status as an 'artiste-bourgeois' was considered by Baudelaire to be even more stifling to genuine modernity than

the bourgeois themselves. As he contends in *Le Musée du Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle* (OCII, p.414):

Il est une chose mille fois plus dangereuse que le bourgeois, c'est l'artiste-bourgeois, qui a été créé pour s'interposer entre le public et le génie; il les cache l'un à l'autre. Le bourgeois qui a peu de notions scientifiques va où le pousse la grande voix de l'artiste-bourgeois. Si on supprimait celui-ci, l'épicier porterait E. Delacroix en triomphe.

Houssaye was, in fact, controlling the kind of artistic diet to which he felt the public should have access by suppressing any endeavours which did not accord with his views, whether political or aesthetic. In interposing himself between the public and what Baudelaire calls '*le génie*', '*l'artiste-bourgeois* facilite par trop l'initiation culturelle de la bourgeoisie en lui offrant de l'art adapté aux capacités du grand public' (Stephens 1999, p.79). Unfortunately, he was not alone. He was one of a group of editorial gate-keepers who saw themselves as responsible for supplying the public with the kind of culture they felt was suitable. Consequently, Baudelaire regarded himself as the individual pitted against the collective, in much the same way that Poe struggled against the American establishment. He was the lone ironic voice in confrontation with the collective '*nous*' of the bourgeoisie. He saw it as his job to parody the

‘quotidien’, in opposition to the institutionalised discourse which the press meted out to the bourgeoisie.

In keeping with the well-worn approach of gushing flattery to newspaper editors, Baudelaire sent Houssaye an instalment of six prose poems to be published in *La Presse* on 26th August 1862, one of which took the form of an accompanying letter in which he ventured to dedicate the poems to the editor on the condition that they pleased and amused him. This dedicatory letter was a masterpiece of cleverly concealed irony cloaked in toe-curling obsequiousness, but Baudelaire was relying on Houssaye’s ‘manque d’acuité herméneutique’ (Murphy 2007, p.61), to prevent him from seeing the irony. It seems that his reasoning was justified. In the letter, Baudelaire reminds Houssaye that he, himself, had ventured into the genre of the prose poem in writing ‘La Chanson du vitrier’ (*OCI*, p.275): ‘Vous-même, mon cher ami, n’avez-vous pas tenté de traduire en une *chanson* le cri strident du *Vitrier*?’ (*OCI*, p.276). The use of the word ‘tenté’ alerts the perceptive reader to the fact that Houssaye had failed to achieve his aim. In the dedicatory letter Baudelaire claims to have been inspired by the volume, *Gaspard de la nuit*, written by Aloysius Bertrand. His stated intention had been to use Bertrand’s poems as a starting point: ‘Ce qu’il avait fait pour la vie ancienne et pittoresque, je voulais le faire pour la vie moderne et abstraite’ (*OCI*, p.275).

This was a disingenuous claim since Baudelaire was fully aware that the artistic level reached by Bertrand fell far short of his own. In reality, he was using the comparison with *Gaspard de la nuit* to highlight his superiority as a poet - a superiority of which he was only too conscious and which is expressed in the prayer he recites in 'A une heure du matin' (OCI, p.287): 'Seigneur mon Dieu! accordez-moi la grâce de produire quelques beaux vers qui me prouvent à moi-même que je ne suis pas le dernier des hommes, que je ne suis pas inférieur à ceux que je méprise' (OCI, p.288).

In the last paragraph of the letter to Houssaye, Baudelaire adopts a tone of 'faux naïveté' accompanied by apparent humility. He admits, with tongue firmly in cheek, to a sense of jealousy, having been unable to achieve the artistic level of his 'mystérieux et brillant modèle' (OCI, p.276). The intention was that Houssaye would construe the last phrase as a tribute to his own poem, 'La Chanson du vitrier', unaware that the prevailing consensus in literary circles was that his own work was distinctly second rate. In reality, the admission Baudelaire makes is in regard to Bertrand's volume of prose poems, entitled 'Gaspard de la nuit', and conceals the fact that he deliberately set out to accomplish something entirely different to Bertrand. Nevertheless, his pretence of humiliation in not having accomplished exactly what he set out to

achieve, is put into perspective by his assertion that anybody else would have been proud to have produced the same quality of work.

Chambers called 'A Arsène Houssaye' (*OCI*, p.275) 'a prose poem about prose poems' (Chambers in Scott 2005, p.24), which suggests it was meant to be exemplary. For Scott, the indirect mockery contained in the dedicatory letter brings into question, therefore, the relationship between the author and reader in *Le Spleen de Paris* as a whole: 'If the dedication is insincere, then it is entirely possible that the entire collection is two-faced' (Scott 2005, p.24). This is in stark contrast to the dedication to Théophile Gautier which precedes *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*OCI*, p.3), where he describes his 'maître et ami' as a 'poète impeccable' and the 'parfait magicien ès lettres françaises'. He makes the dedication 'avec les sentiments de la plus profonde humilité', but on that occasion there is no disputing that the sentiments were sincere. The complete lack of irony in this dedication suggests that the sincerity of *Les Fleurs du Mal* is to be taken as read, whereas the dedication of *Le Spleen de Paris* alerts the reader to approach the prose poems with a healthy dose of scepticism.

The first six prose poems to appear in *La Presse* on 26 August, 1862, replaced the popular 'feuilleton', (normally occupying the 'rez-de-chausée' of the first page – Compagnon 2014, p.155). The poems were 'A Arsène Houssaye' (if it can be described as a prose poem), 'L'Etranger', 'La Désespoir

de la vieille', 'Le Confiteur de l'artiste', 'Un Plaisant', and 'La Chambre Double'.

In the dedicatory letter Baudelaire refers to his anthology of prose poems as

'cette tortueuse fantaisie', and asserts that: 'Hachez-la en nombreux

fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part' (OCI, p.275). This

seems a clear invitation for the editor to publish the poems in any order he

likes, in contrast to the typical 'feuilleton' consisting of a series of

chronologically connected instalments, each requiring the reader to recall the

events from the preceding instalment to build a coherent story. This

established format had the added advantage that it encouraged the reader to

buy each newspaper in the series, thereby helping to foster a loyal readership.

It would therefore require a leap of faith from the editor to replace the

'feuilleton' with a selection of poems having no apparent connection with each

other. This seems like a deliberate challenge by Baudelaire to the established

journalistic order.

This first publication in *La Presse*, on 26 août 1862, 'quand ils côtoient la

Bourse, le fait divers, la publicité' (Compagnon 2014, p.55), raises the question

of how the prose poems would be read in their original context. Compagnon

imagines the reader opening his newspaper as he eats breakfast, expecting the

usual daily fare, of which he is the passive recipient. Instead, the reader is

taken to task by 'L'Etranger' (OCI, p.277). This poem consists of an

interrogation of a stranger by an insistent questioner. When interrogated about his feelings for gold – a symbol of materialism – the stranger replies ‘Je le hais comme vous haïssez Dieu’ (*OCI*, p.277). The ‘vous’ in this quote represents not only the reader but *all* the readers of the press, condemned for their materialism and their atheism (Compagnon 2014, p.56). The reader, then, becomes the apostrophe of the poet and is subjected to an examination of his conscience, rather than simply absorbing the daily round of information. In regard to the editor, this raises the question; was he conscious of the challenging nature of the poems? and did he appreciate that the condemnation of the reader could be taken as an insult to him and to his readership? Since Houssaye published three separate instalments of the prose poems it is reasonable to conclude that the answer to both questions is no.

Baudelaire’s jaundiced view of the press comes to the surface in several of his prose poems. ‘La Chambre Double’ (*OCI*, p.280) was the first poem of the third selection of prose poems to be published in *La Presse* on the 24 September, 1862. The first part of the poem describes, in a euphoric, drug-induced mood, an idealised room imagined by the narrator. This is followed by a sudden relapse into reality with the realisation that his actual room has all the characteristics of a hovel. The switch in moods is signalled by a loud knock at the door: ‘Et puis un Spectre est entré’. The narrator speculates that the

'Spectre' could be (amongst other possibilities) an editor's messenger chasing him for a manuscript - the latter possibility signifying the perpetual conflict Baudelaire experienced with newspapers and revues whom he referred to as 'la canaille littéraire' (*OCI*, p.700). Negative references to editors are a feature of several prose poems, such as that made in 'A une heure du matin' (*OCI*, p.287) where the narrator recalls a conversation with the director of a revue in which the latter claimed, "C'est ici le parti des honnêtes gens", thereby implying that the editors of the other revues were dishonest rascals (*OCI*, p.288)

Another allusion to the press is contained in the introductory section of 'Le Gâteau' (*OCI*, p.297) in which the narrator describes the magnificence of the Pyrennees:

Bref, je me sentais, grâce à l'enthousiasmante beauté dont j'étais environné, en parfaite paix avec moi-même et avec l'univers; je crois même que, dans ma parfaite béatitude et dans mon total oubli de tout le mal terrestre, j'en était venu à ne plus trouver si ridicules les journaux qui prétendent que l'homme est né bon.

It was Baudelaire's belief that the contemporary press (and in this case the newspaper, *La Presse*) perpetuated the philosophy of the essential goodness of human nature, an idea which clashed directly with Baudelaire's belief in

original sin, signified by the vicious fight between the two young brothers in Le Gâteau. In Terdiman's opinion the battle Baudelaire waged against the prevailing philosophy of the press was part of a general fear amongst all the writers whose works composed the cultural canon of this period:

that the dominant discursive apparatuses, the increasingly pervasive and powerful languages of everyday life which confronted them, (ie. the press controlled by the editors) were blocking and swallowing *all* efforts to differentiate. The fear is that distinction, even signified in the consecrated and previously protected medium of the esthetic object, may *already* have become impossible (Terdiman in Stephens 1999, p.74).

Nevertheless, Baudelaire sought that distinction even if it meant treading a borderline between thought-provoking poetry on the one hand and editorial rejection on the other.

Along with the general readers, the editors had to determine the role of the narrators in the works of both authors. This was a task of some magnitude since the character of their narrators changed according to the effect the author wished to produce. Unfortunately, the prevalence of the first-person pronoun in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe and the prose poems of Charles Baudelaire have led many readers to the understandable, but mistaken

assumption, that the views of the narrators coincide with those of the authors (Scott 2005, p.7). Given that both writers originally published their works in the written press with a readership composed, for the most part, of those seeking a relief from the heavier political and social questions of the day in the section of the magazine reserved for lighter entertainment (most notably the 'feuilleton'), it is not surprising that hidden allegory, subtle irony, and even downright hoaxing would be mistaken for sincere expressions of their authors' opinions. In Baudelaire's view it is the capacity to discern irony and ridicule which the readers lack. They are incapable of understanding that an individual (and even more so a poet) could make humorous or ironic statements without assuming responsibility for them. If they take for granted that the 'I' of the prose poem always says exactly and directly what he thinks, then they inevitably allow the many-faceted and complex nuances of the text to pass them by.

Baudelaire was well aware that most of his readers would not delve deeply into their interpretation of his prose poems. Even in those poems where, on the face of it, the narrative seems simple, it is often the case that the web woven is extremely dense and that the theme needs to be scrutinised with a sceptical mind. For those few readers who were capable of such an interpretation Murphy et al contend that Baudelaire's aim was to *program*

their reactions and, more precisely, to propose various avenues of interpretation leading to a diversity of conclusions, even to the extent of being so far apart as to be contradictory (Murphy 2007, p.26).

One of the advantages that Baudelaire derives from this multi-faceted strategy is the possibility of expressing not only positive convictions (albeit indirectly), but also interrogations, combinations of assertions, and questions directed at a *series* of prose poems which address moral issues, in Paris or elsewhere – always taking great care to avoid preaching, but certainly intending to promote reflection. Making use of the antimonies employed in connection with the social and literary life of that epoch (tradition/modernity, countryside/city, provinces/Paris, inspiration/workmanship, Nature/artifice – Murphy 2007, p.29), Baudelaire perpetuates the logic sketched out in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*. He combines an awareness of the historical situation (ie that of the Second Empire in all of its social and political aspects) with the constant drive to point out, using a non-didactic approach, important traits of human nature. Consequently, beyond the aesthetic level, Baudelaire examines the connections between history and the human condition. It is this which links a significant number of his prose poems, in particular those which explore poverty in its relation to property and violence. Although almost all of the poems devoted to such themes advance arguments which seem to suggest

that the poet has taken up a particular philosophical position, their overall effect is to present a constellation of disparate arguments. For example, 'Le Joujou du pauvre' seems to allude to the possibility that poverty might be remedied by political action, whereas in 'Le Gâteau' the narrator seems resigned to the fact that poverty is linked to the existence of original sin, for which there is no remedy. The two poems present arguments which are valid in themselves, but which are contradictory. This contradiction shows that the principal preoccupation of Baudelaire is the question of cause. 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' (*OCI*, p.285), 'Le Gâteau' (*OCI*, p.297) 'Le Joujou du pauvre' (*OCI*, p.304), 'Les Yeux des pauvres' (*OCI*, p.317) – are all accompanied by the beginnings of reflection in the philosophical, psychological and anthropological sense, which the reader has to extend or, occasionally, challenge. What more challenging philosophical question could the reader be faced with than that presented by the narrator who concludes at the end of 'Le Mauvais Vitrier': 'Mais qu'importe l'éternité de la damnation à qui a trouvé dans une seconde l'infini de la jouissance?' (*OCI*, p.287). The thoughtful reader is bound to reflect on the ultimate worth of a life spent in unswerving moral correctness, and perhaps be tempted by the 'Imp of the Perverse'.

Other poems concerning strange characters (like 'Mademoiselle Bistouri') are really parables dealing with unbalanced, superstitious or ridiculous people,

but there are also those poems which bring out the shortcomings of the narrators, who nevertheless, often have a superior vision of themselves. It is necessary, therefore, to go beyond the hermeneutic considerations raised by analysing individually these prose poems and to bring to light, at least partially, the anthropological foundations of *Le Spleen de Paris* as a whole. It is true that the collection does not have the same formal allegorical status as *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but by means of its network of recurring themes and its internal intertextuality, it *does have* a system. The reader's attention is attracted by the links between the poems, but is faced with a series of incoherencies for which only they can find any resolution.

On the one hand, the subjects treated in *Le Spleen de Paris* constitute, in themselves, a significant choice. Baudelaire wanted to trigger deeply felt reactions on a range of political theories, intending to shock those who subscribed to those theories. On the other hand, without seeking to label the various aspects of Baudelaire's ideology, Murphy et al contend that *Le Spleen de Paris* is an astonishing mixture of subversive elements from both the political right and left which, nevertheless, constitutes an identifiable whole. In this context, it is important to remember that in the revolution of 1848, Baudelaire showed himself to be well informed not only on a political level, but also in matters of economic theory. Although he claimed 'le droit de se

contredire' (*OClI*, p.306) it would be unwise to jump to the conclusion that there is no coherence in his analysis of problems of society and existence in *Le Spleen de Paris* (Murphy 2007, p.27).

Although Poe catered for the credulous section of the public who would buy into his hoaxes, only the alert, informed and discerning reader could be relied on by the authors to interpret the works as the writers intended. In Baudelaire's case the legal context had a bearing on the content of his work. In 1857 he had been convicted of infringing the censorship laws and was obliged to cut six poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* as a consequence. It is likely that this would leave him with a guarded and cynical view of the public's future reception of his work, leading to greater reliance on hidden allegory (Carpenter S. in Scott 2005, p.11n33). Eugene W. Holland (in Scott 2005, p.11n33) makes reference to 'Le Masque' (*OCl*, p.23), a verse poem by Baudelaire about an amorphic statuette by Ernest Christophe called 'La Comédie humaine' which takes the form of a woman hiding her sorrow behind a grinning mask. The direct full-frontal view of the statuette appears to show her smiling. It is only when the observer moves to the side that they see the real face of sadness behind the mask. (Holland contends that the statuette inspired Baudelaire to 'build a double reading into his poetry, allowing it to offer itself, on the one hand, to a rather conventional "communicative" reading and, on the other, to

an ironised “textual” reading’). The inference is that it is only by viewing the prose poems from an oblique angle that their true meaning becomes apparent.

From Baudelaire’s perspective, in France, it seemed that in Poe’s case antebellum America was an inhospitable place for a poet where, ‘L’activité matérielle, exagérée jusqu’aux proportions d’une manie nationale, laisse dans les esprits bien peu de place pour les choses qui ne sont pas de la terre’ (*OCII*, p.299). Baudelaire judged the United States to be ‘une vaste prison’ (*OCII*, p.297) that Poe struggled all his life to escape. He was resigned to the fact that his own translation of Poe’s works into French would have little chance of success, ‘auprès d’un public qui préfère de beaucoup l’amusement et l’émotion à la plus importante vérité philosophique’ (*OCII*, p.318). This disenchanted view of the reading public *en masse* contrasts with Baudelaire’s image of the reader he envisages for *Le Spleen de Paris*. In his dedicatory letter, ‘A Arsène Houssay’, the reader is given the same status as the author and the potential publisher. All three are at liberty to read the prose poems in any order they wish. With the author, the editor, and the reader in mind he writes: ‘Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture; car je ne suspends pas la volonté rétive de celui-ci au fil interminable d’une intrigue superflue’ (*OCI*, p.275).

In other words, Baudelaire considers it advantageous that the reader be spared the trouble of having to follow some needless storyline. Compare this with his collected verse poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, consisting of six sections, each with a theme, where he was at pains to stress that the order of the poems was an essential aspect of the work, and that it *did* matter that the reader was aware of the overall theme. In fact, this 'architecture secrète' was referred to by Barbey D'Aurevilly at the time of the trial in 1857. He claimed there was 'un plan calculé par le poète, méditatif et volontaire'. He went on to say that:

Les Fleurs du Mal ne sont pas à la suite les unes des autres comme tant de morceaux lyriques, dispersés par l'inspiration et ramassés dans un recueil sans d'autre raison que de les réunir. Elles sont moins des poésies qu'une oeuvre poétique de la plus forte unité (D'Aurevilly in Isaak S. 2020, p.34).

It is significant that the first verse poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is addressed 'Au Lecteur' where the reader's status is not only signified by the very fact of it being the subject of the first poem, but also by the final line: 'Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère! (OCI, p.6).

In this address to the reader Baudelaire treats the reader as an equal, confiding that he knows him to be just the same kind of flawed individual that the author sees in himself.

Having established the pride of place occupied by the reader in the process of literature, it is important to note that rarely is there a direct interface between author and reader in Poe's tales or in Baudelaire's prose poems.

Poe's 'I' does not signify the author. It signifies a narrator whose role it is to engage the reader from their own perspective – a perspective which is separate from that of the author. Moreover, the narrators have their own personae which, according to James Gargano, 'possess a character and consciousness distinct from those of their creator' (Gargano J.W. 1963, p.177).

Brett Zimmerman reinforces this argument:

the style in which each narrator relates his story is not Poe's – he and his narrators are entirely distinct; Poe, as a deliberate, conscious, and careful craftsman maintains an aesthetic detachment from his protagonists (Zimmerman 2005, p.15).

To reflect the personalities, the emotions, concerns, obsessions, even the madness of his story-tellers Poe uses stylistic features such as rhetorical tropes and schemes, punctuation, notional sets, italics, diction and syntax. The combined effect is to set them apart from the author and from each other.

Poe's mastery of the English language is well known – sometimes grandiloquent – even, occasionally, pretentious. In his *Marginalia* (Poe 1846, p.116) he claims that 'No thought is out of the reach of language. For my own part I have never had a thought which I could not set down in words, with even more distinctness than that with which I conceived it'. Yet there are several cases in his short stories where the narrator finds an experience beyond the reach of mere words, such as those described in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. For example, Pym, on encountering a strange vessel describes 'a smell, a stench such as the whole world has *no name for – no conception of...*' (Poe 2008, p.81). In 'The Fall of the House of Usher' there are at least three examples where the narrator finds himself powerless to articulate his experience. He describes his time spent with Roderick Usher in joint study as follows: '*Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way*' (WCL, p.176) (my italics). Again, in describing the paintings which he and Usher studied he says 'I would in vain endeavour to deduce more than a small portion *which should lie within the compass of merely written words*' (WLC, p.176) (my italics). Lastly, in describing Usher's belief in 'the sentience of all vegetable things... *I lack words to express the full extent, of the earnest abandon of his persuasion*' (WCL, p.178) (my italics). Zimmerman sees the

contrast between Poe's *Marginalia* claim above, and the designed inarticulateness of his narrators, as evidence of an 'aesthetic distance' which Poe maintains between him and them.

Another strategy Poe uses to maintain an objective detachment from his narrators is his generous use of hyperbole. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, the narrator recounts how 'a loud and long scream or yell, as if from *the throats of a thousand demons*, seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere around and above the boat' (Poe 2008, p.8). In a similar vein, 'he found himself beneath the surface, whirling round and round with inconceivable rapidity' (Poe 2008, p.7). If the rapidity is inconceivable for the narrator, it is surely conceivable for Poe given his claim that no thought is out of reach of his language. Zimmerman argues that such absurd exaggerations are designed to alert the attentive reader to the unreliability of the narrator, or even to hint that 'Pym' is in fact a hoax.

A cursory reading of 'The Black Cat' as might be made by a naïve, uninformed reader could lead to the conclusion that Poe is merely a purveyor of sensationalism. The hyperbole in which the narrator indulges during the heightened state of psychological arousal he experiences in the final scene (describing the discovery of his wife's body), is evident in the phrase, 'a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of

hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation' (WLC, p.68). Clearly, the narrator is suffering a breakdown but the reader is mistaken if they think that, by extension, the author has lost control of the narrator. Gargano maintains that Poe explores the neuroses of his characters with probing intelligence. He permits his narrator to revel and flounder into torment, but he sees beyond the torment to its causes. Though his narrators are often demented, Poe is conspicuously sane. Gargano reaches that conclusion on the basis that the design of the whole story shows 'an ironical and comprehensive intelligence critically and artistically ordering events... even if his narrators have a limited comprehension of their own problems and states of mind '(Gargano 1963, p.178).

In 'The Black Cat' the narrator cannot accept that his violence towards the two cats and his wife is the result of his own mental unbalance. He proudly boasts of his self-control even when gripped by madness. He attempts to rationalise his behaviour by insisting that he is the victim of the motiveless and irresistible impulse of perversity – the compulsion to do wrong for wrong's sake – yet the concept of perversity really *explains* nothing. The tale illustrates Poe's skill in probing the psychology of his narrators (in a pre-Freudian era) while retaining a detached distance from them. Gargano assert that:

Poe's narrators possess a character and consciousness distinct from those of their creator. These protagonists, I am convinced, speak their own thoughts and are the dupes of their own passions. In short, Poe understands them far better than they can possibly understand themselves. (Gargano 1963, p.177).

Unfortunately, the control that Poe exercised on his narrators was so masterful that many of his readers have associated the evil of their actions with Poe himself. Gargano rejects this popular tendency – 'the nameless narrator does not speak for Poe' (Gargano 1963, p.180). Could it be that Poe's reputation amongst contemporaneous authors as a scathing critic – the 'Tomahawk Man' – and the widespread perception that he was an alcoholic (*OCII*, p.297), had resulted in a predisposition amongst the reading public and fellow authors to attribute the sins of the narrators to the author himself? Many years later the same misunderstanding would arise in the relationship between Baudelaire and his readership. Both authors recognised this confusion of their own persona with the narrators of their works and exploited it to good effect. In Poe's case he satirised his own sensationalism in works like 'How to write a Blackwood article' (*WLC*, p.310). In this spoof, the magazine's editor, Mr. Blackwood, gives advice to an aspiring author on writing an article for his magazine. It includes all the features which the reading public would

recognise in Poe's tales – the inevitable sensation of being buried alive, or falling into a volcano or getting stuck fast in a chimney; he recommends the use of 'big words' and the liberal distribution of obscure Greek and Latin phrases which would bear witness to the erudition of the author; he advises the would-be author to quote examples of little-known Spanish verse, as well as including the names of classical Italian and German writers. In short, it is a parody of the elaborate and occasionally pompous style that Poe, himself, indulged in. The fact that he produced such satires was good evidence that he was fully aware of his public image.

Baudelaire was equally conscious of his public persona. It provoked in him an ironic response by means of which some of his prose poems seemed to *invite* the misrecognition that *Les Fleurs du Mal* had engendered. It is easy to read the prose poems 'Enivrez-vous', 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' and 'Assommons les pauvres!', and form the impression that the author must be a wholly irresponsible and amoral individual. In all three prose poems the narrators' actions are contrary to socially accepted norms, thereby provoking the disapproval of the reader. By deliberately drawing the reader's disapproval towards the narrator, who many contemporaneous readers identified closely with the author, he distracted their attention from the real target of Baudelaire's wrath, which was the reader themselves.

Brett Zimmerman (2005, p.17-23) investigates Poe's style with regard to punctuation. He focuses on 'The Tell-Tale Heart' to demonstrate the use of exclamation marks to express the increasing vehemence of the narrator whose murder of an old man has aroused the suspicions of the neighbours. When they hear a shriek, the police are summoned. The narrator smiles and explains away the shriek as his own in a dream. The officers are satisfied. His manner has convinced them and he is at ease. This part of his description is accompanied by an absence of exclamation marks, reflecting his calmness and his feeling that he has convinced them of his innocence. The narrator's initial calmness is then disturbed by, what he takes to be, a ringing in his ears. Unfortunately, the policemen do not leave and the noise increases so much that the narrator is sure that they must hear it, and yet are pretending not to notice it. The result of this paranoia is that he convinces himself that their apparent pleasantness and satisfaction with his account, is a form of mockery. Unable to bear their hypocrisy any longer, he admits to the murder and beseeches them to tear up the floorboards to reveal the old man's body. Poe demonstrates his control of the scene by a masterly use of punctuation to heighten the tension. From the time that the narrator discovers that the sound is not within his ears, to the realisation that it is the beating of the old man's heart that he hears, is equivalent to two paragraphs of text containing no less

than twenty-four exclamation marks, including thirteen in the last three lines (Zimmerman 2005, p.19). The use of these exclamation marks serves to accentuate the narrator's agony and intensify his delusions. They show the transition from the narrator's vaunted self-control into the frenzy that results in his self-betrayal. Yet, whereas the narrator becomes increasingly demented, Poe remains in full control.

Gargano contends that Poe's tales are more than the effusions of their narrators' often disordered mentalities: 'Through the irony of his characters' self-betrayal and through the development and arrangement of his dramatic actions, Poe suggests to his readers ideas never entertained by the narrators' (Gargano 1963, p.178). He intends his readers to keep their powers of analysis and judgement ever alert; he does not require complete surrender to the experience of the sensations being felt by his characters. This would reduce Poe's short stories, like 'The Black Cat' and 'The Tell-Tale Heart', to the level of purely sensationalist horror stories, fully deserving of the criticism levelled by T. S. Eliot, that they are the work of a writer 'who has the intellect of a highly gifted person before puberty' (Eliot 1949, p.335). This criticism is made in regard to Poe's themes and subjects. Contesting this claim, Zimmerman contends that 'The point of Poe's technique is not to enable readers to lose themselves in strange or outrageous emotions, but to see these emotions and

those obsessed by them, from a rich and thoughtful perspective' (Gargano 1963, p.178).

Accordingly, the reader must adopt a detached approach to the narrators' actions, interpreting them as the outward signs of a mental illness over which the protagonist has no control, rather than the gratuitous manifestations of evil. For example, in 'The Tell-Tale Heart', the reader has to understand the *inevitability* of the old man's murder, as well as the *satisfaction* of the murderer in cleverly dissecting the body, to more effectively hide it and expertly cover his tracks. Poe guides the reader to perceiving the narrator as driven by compulsion rather than acting in free will. Zimmerman suggests that:

Poe as a stylist is much more conscientious and deliberate than many readers realise: the stylistic features in any given tale, displayed by any given narrator, are suited to theme, technique, and characterisation.

The styles of the narrators are as various as their particular mental illnesses or world views, balanced or obsessive (Zimmerman 2005, p.27).

Zimmerman contends that both 'The Black Cat' and 'The Tell-Tale Heart' have two simultaneous perspectives: the narrative and the authorial. Both call for perceptive readers to watch the narrators *fall short* in their attempts at persuasion, and to see the irony that Poe intended. This is clearly demonstrated by the way in which the narrator of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' makes

every effort to convince the reader that he is sane – ‘you should have seen how wisely I proceeded’ is his response to his own question, ‘How, then, am I mad?’, in anticipation of the reader’s thoughts (*WLC*, p.117). He goes on to describe to the reader the ingenuity of his plan but, in the end, he falls short by falling victim to his own paranoia and confessing his crime. According to Wilbur, ‘the story seems to say that, if imagination rebels against everyday temporal consciousness and earthly attachments, the cost may be a self-destructive madness’ (Wilbur 1982, p.9).

Ronald Bieganowski (1988, p.175-187) contends that the concept of ‘The Self-Consuming Artifact’ as applied by Stanley E. Fish to seventeenth-century literature can also be applied to Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories. Focusing on the reader, Fish distinguishes between rhetorical presentations and dialectical presentations. The former satisfies the needs of its readers by presenting for approval ideas that the reader already holds, and confirms them in their belief that what they have always thought about the world is true and that their ways of thinking are sufficient. The latter is more disturbing for the reader. It requires them to break out of their comfort zone and search for the ‘truth’ themselves rather than be presented with it. The reader who takes up the challenge of the dialectical approach undergoes a more painful reading process but is rewarded with a better self, one commensurate with the effort they

have made. However, the dialectical presentation succeeds at its own expense because it conveys those who experience it to a point where they are beyond the aid that discursive or rational forms can offer, and therefore it becomes the vehicle of its own abandonment. It is consumed in the workings of its own best effects. It becomes a self-consuming artifact which signifies most successfully when it *fails*, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture. This seems to accord with Poe's idea of 'supernal beauty', which is inaccessible by poetry except as the experience of its *failed* achievement. It is the desire of 'the moth for the star' (Poe 1850, p.1). Richard Wilbur claims that 'it is possible for the soul to shake off this temporal, rational, physical world and escape, if only for a moment, to a realm of unfettered vision'. The narrators of Poe's short stories, like 'The Fall of the House of Usher', pursue glimpses of Beauty in words but they can never ultimately capture the ideal so they are doomed to failure. The discerning reader accompanies the narrator in this quest, seeking their own 'glimpse of Beauty' by way of their own imaginings (Wilbur 2016, pp.145-163).

Interpretation of Baudelaire's prose poems involves the same kind of complicity between the author and the reader as between Poe and his readers (Stephens and Lloyd 1993, p.75). Many of the prose poems employ the use of 'je' as a fictional character and, again, often the fiction has been mistaken for

autobiography (Scott 2005, p.4). The diverse narratorial personae range from those expressing themselves sincerely to those presenting as doubles (or alter egos) of the poet, and then to those who can be identified as ironic pseudo-selves. Even the dedication to Arsène Houssaye has been characterised by many critics as insincere - indeed, that it constitutes an indirect mockery of its addressee (eg. in Isaak 2020, p.226). Perhaps the letter to Houssaye is an indication to the perceptive reader that the prose poems should not be taken at face value. Is it possible that Baudelaire foresaw his readership on two levels? – the first accepting the poems on a surface level, untroubled by the ironic dimension, and the second delving deeper into the allegorical aspects of the poems and appreciating their hidden irony.

It is not difficult to imagine the influence that Poe might have made on Baudelaire with respect to hidden irony. Poe was famed for his literary hoaxes which were scientifically plausible but, at the same time, a mockery of his readers' gullibility. As Scott comments: 'Given that Baudelaire considered Poe to be a kindred spirit, it would not be surprising if he ... were to have considered producing hoaxes with a similar purpose' (Scott 2005, p.22). 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' illustrates this practice. On first reading this prose poem as a naïve reader, some clear messages can be taken from the poem; that it is an example of black humour enjoyed by the narrator and the reader at the

expense of the glazier; that it exemplifies the theme of perversity which Baudelaire would have been familiar with in Poe's short stories, such as 'The Imp of the Perverse', and that it makes a telling comment on the class distinctions in nineteenth-century Paris, pitting the hard-hearted, bourgeois city dweller against the honest, hard-working glazier. The modern-day reader might laugh aloud at the action of the resident of the apartment in throwing a plant pot out of the window to smash the glazier's wares as he left the building. It would be surprising if many naïve nineteenth-century readers did not take similar messages from 'Le Mauvais Vitrier', remaining oblivious to any other hidden meanings. It may not have occurred to them that they might be the unsuspecting victim of a hoax, although there is a clue in the parenthetical paragraph in the middle of the text which mentions 'l'esprit de *mystification* ... qui nous pousse sans résistance vers une foule d'actions dangereuses ou inconvenantes' (OCI, p.285).

The difference in historical context between modern-day readers and that of Baudelaire's contemporaries, is that the poem was published soon after the storm which followed the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (June, 1857). The resentment of the reading public which Baudelaire felt, might well have led him to trap those naïve readers who had reacted so insensitively to his verse collection. In 'Shifting Perspectives' (Scott 2005, p.192 n111) Carpenter argues

that the audience which had rejected *Les Fleurs du Mal* is attacked in the form of the glazier, who represents the positivist dominant culture, and prefers transparency rather than coloured glass. Baudelaire is attacking the glazier's ignorance of aesthetics and therefore the public's analogical ignorance. In fact, according to Scott, the narrator's unmediated views of reality may operate to alert us to the dangers of any literal or realist reading of the prose poem itself (Scott 2005, p.194).

It is important that a distinction be made between the author and the narrator of 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' in the sense that the former, by his own account, created his prose poems by carefully crafting them and relying little on inspiration – Baudelaire's textual hoax is meticulously calculated, but the spontaneous practical joke of the narrator is entirely unplanned. The reader then has to make a choice between identifying the poet with the excessively rash narrator, or recognising that the latter is the instrument of the former, and that the gullibility of the narrator and the reader are being tested.

The literal-minded reader is again the poet's target in 'Le Galant Tireur' (*OCI*, p.349). On the face of it, this prose poem seems to take as its theme the problem of 'ennui', which was a preoccupation with Baudelaire. The narrator and his wife stop at a shooting range for no other reason than to kill time. He is mocked by his wife for his lack of skill so he makes use of a nearby doll to

shoot her in effigy. Scott believes that Baudelaire used a tactic of ‘narrative indirection’ (Scott 2005, p.136) in *Le Spleen de Paris* to target the public that mocked his work. The displaced attack of the marksman on his wife allegorises the poet’s attack on the literal-minded reader. This is signified in the narrator’s address to his wife in the last line of the prose poem: “Ah! mon cher ange, combien je vous remercie de mon adresse” (*OCI*, p.350) The use of the word ‘vous’ in the plural subtly merges the reader and the female character.

The idea of a displaced attack on a target – in this case that of the doll for the wife/reader – may have its origins in a short story by Edgar Allan Poe entitled ‘Mystification’ (*WLC*, pp.323-329) which recounts the story of Baron Ritzner von Jung who is entertaining a group of fellow students at his university residence. One of the students is an expert duellist but also ‘a very great fool’ (*WLC*, p.326). The baron deliberately sets out to provoke the latter who reacts with a direct insult. Under normal circumstances the next step would be a physical confrontation in the form of a duel, but the baron avoids that outcome by making use of the expert duellist’s reflection in a mirror. He threatens to throw a decanter of wine at the image, thus obviating the need for physical violence. Since no direct violence has been used, his opponent is powerless to retaliate. ‘Le Galant Tireur’ may well be an allusion to Poe’s ‘Mystification’ by allegorising this technique of indirect attack. It may be that

the real intention of both Poe and Baudelaire is to target the reader's complacency in coming to conclusions too hastily. Rather than fall into this trap, Rabelais suggests that the reader approach the prose poems with intense concentration, like a dog approaches a bone (Rabelais in Scott 2005, p.123). In the midst of all the indigestible material is the marrow which must be sought out carefully. Despite *Le Spleen de Paris*'s haphazard arrangement, the marrow that the reader is searching for is the ever-moving target of contemporary folly. Far from being presented with the author's ready-made thoughts the reader needs to be dogged and determined in rooting out the target of Baudelaire's satire, which is often the reader themselves.

If it is true that the triumph of the material over the ideal is *explicitly* thematised by a conventional reading in many of the prose poems, this conclusion may be overturned by an allegorical reading of the texts. According to Baudelaire in reference to Wagner, 'Dans la musique, comme dans la peinture et même dans la parole écrite, ... il y a toujours une lacune complétée par l'imagination de l'auditeur' (*OCII*, pp.781-782). The implication is that the prose poems may be understood to require an act of creative completion on the part of their readers. This seems to comply with Stanley Fish's criteria for 'dialectical presentations' (Bieganowski 1988, p.175), which Bieganowski contends are so characteristic of Poe.

The need for an act of creative completion on behalf of the reader is called for in Baudelaire's prose poem, 'Un Plaisant', which describes an encounter in the street during New Year celebrations of a smartly dressed bourgeois gentleman with a donkey, who is being whipped and urged on by a ruffian. The gentleman addresses the donkey in mock ceremony with the words, "Je vous la souhaite bonne et heureuse!" He then looks to his friends for approval. The last sentence of the poem uttered by the narrator is the subject of (intended?) ambiguity: 'Pour moi, je fus pris subitement d'une incommensurable rage contre ce magnifique imbécile, qui me parut concentrer en lui tout l'esprit de la France' (*OCI*, p.279). The ambiguity lies in the words 'magnifique imbécile' which could refer to the gentleman or the donkey. The reader's understanding of the poem hinges on their choice of the gentleman or the donkey in applying this term. By choosing, (in sympathy with the innocent donkey), to apply the term to the gentleman, the reader tacitly identifies with the gentleman, inviting the scorn of the narrator. Conversely, if the reader interprets 'magnifique imbécile' as applying to the donkey (which then embodies all the spirit of France), the reader might be understood to resemble the donkey, representing an ignorant public (Scott 2005, p.36). The unquestioning obedience of the donkey might then correspond to the unquestioning

obedience of the French public in reading Baudelaire's poems without the necessary spirit of scepticism and cynicism which he felt was appropriate.

The dialectical nature of the prose poems is well illustrated in 'Un Plaisant', requiring from the reader an individual interpretation which must be teased out according to their own world view. This principle applies equally to 'Assommons les Pauvres!', where again, the possible interpretations demand deep reflection on the part of the reader. In this prose poem the narrator's first-person account relates his emergence from his bedroom into the fresh air after a fortnight spent reading books on social improvement. As he enters a bar a beggar asks him for alms and the narrator responds, prompted by a good angel or a good demon (perhaps the imp of the perverse), by assaulting the man viciously. The beggar retaliates vigorously by giving the narrator two black eyes and four broken teeth. The narrator then claims that this was exactly the response he was looking for, since his initial attack was intended to spur the beggar into regaining his pride and his life. This simple narrative has engendered several theories from critics. Some believe that it is the narrator's philanthropic reading material that is caricatured by the text (or his misinterpretation of it). This leads to the conclusion that the prose poem is an ironic retaliation against bourgeois humanitarianism (Scott 2005, p.105). From another point of view, the narrator's actions could be considered to be

altruistic, if a little barbaric. From this perspective, it is possible that the poem is parodying the gullibility of the bourgeoisie in accepting uncritically the reading material aimed at social improvement.

Some commentators have taken seriously the injunction to beat up the poor to increase their self-reliance but Hiddleston sees it as 'an ironical denunciation of the inhumanity of modern society, in which only the strongest and the most fortunate can survive' (Hiddleston 1987, p.39). However, his interpretation of 'Assommons les Pauvres!' conflates the poet with the narrator whereas Maria Scott emphasises that Baudelaire always seeks to maintain a distance between himself and the narrator. Although his narrator is clearly prone to acting in accordance with a wicked exterior force, the poet, in his private life, was clearly in favour of self-restraint. In evidence of this, Scott cites a letter to Nadar (1864) in which Baudelaire remarks on his own view of personal violence with reference to a real-life incident in which he was accused of assaulting a Belgian: 'Croirais-tu que *moi*, j'aie pu *battre* un Belge? C'est incroyable n'est-ce pas? Que je puisse battre quelqu'un, c'est absurde' (Scott 2005, p.107). It seems that the self-righteous narrator is therefore the butt of Baudelaire's irony. The narrator justifies his attack on the beggar using his theory of equality retroactively, claiming that, in trading blows, the beggar has proven himself to be his equal. However, the hypocrisy of the narrator's claim

is presented in the final line of the poem: 'Il m'a bien juré qu'il avait compris ma théorie, et qu'il obéirait à mes conseils' (*OCI*, p.359). This statement reeks of arrogance and class superiority. Far from representing the views of the poet, the narrator is representing the bourgeoisie in what Maria Scott calls "their self-serving obtuseness as well as their thinly-veiled barbarity" (Scott 2005, p.110).

The above discussion demonstrates themes which are common to both authors. Firstly, neither Poe nor Baudelaire saw their readers as passive recipients of ideas which flattered their self-image. Reading the works of both authors was often challenging and unsettling. Yet the reward for their readers' acceptance of the challenge was a reconsideration and reappraisal of their own stance in regard to important human issues, whether literary or social. The use of irony, allegory and hoaxing was so skilfully orchestrated that it was only the discerning and sceptical reader who could "suck out the substantial marrow" (Rabelais in Scott 2005, p.123), and appreciate the underlying message. If we are to agree that Bieganski is correct in thinking that Poe's short stories were dialectical, in that they demanded an active engagement on the part of the reader, then there is a strong argument that the same degree of engagement is required of Baudelaire's readers, even if it leads to a diversity of

conclusions. Often the pieces are so constructed that an act of completion is required of the reader – each reader making his own choices.

Both authors produced works which could be read in one sitting, and in which it was vital that no words be wasted. Poe famously commented that the very first sentence had to contribute to the ultimate effect of the work. Even apparent throwaway asides by the narrators could have a significant bearing on the work as a whole. In 'The Imp of the Perverse', for instance, the narrator writes: 'No sooner had I spoken these words, than I felt an icy chill creep into my heart. I had some experience in these fits of perversity (whose nature I have been at trouble to explain)' (*WLC*, p.265). The words in parenthesis are seemingly superfluous, but in fact call attention to the act of narration 'as an action going on in the present time of its being read', thus intensifying the immediacy of effect for the reader (Bieganowski 1988, p.181). Following in this theme, the apparently matter-of-fact inclusion of the phrase 'il y a seize ou dix-sept ans' in parenthesis in the first sentence of Baudelaire's 'Assommoirs les Pauvres!' (*OCI*, p.357) actually places the historical setting of the prose poem in 1848, the year of revolution in which the new government established the principle of 'le droit au travail' and 'ateliers nationaux' for the unemployed, the latter quickly becoming reduced to a mechanism for distributing dole (Tuchinsky 2005, pp.470-497). This context is signified only in passing by the

narrator but is crucial to the reader's interpretation of the poem since it has a bearing on the practice of begging.

The realisation that the author and the narrator have different identities is critical to the reading of these works. One of the most admirable aspects of the pieces is the skill both Poe and Baudelaire demonstrate in maintaining a distance between themselves and their narrators and in creating narrating personae which are fit for purpose. The readiness with which even expert critics sometimes conflate the poet and the narrator in their works, testifies to the credibility of their narrators and the skill of the authors.

CHAPTER 3

CONSCIOUS, UNCONSCIOUS AND SELF-REFLEXIVE IMITATION

If an author takes credit for ideas which they have taken from someone else in the full knowledge that it is not their own work, then they would be justly condemned for plagiarism. If the style or the structure of the work shows a degree of influence without wholesale imitation, then the accusation of plagiarism becomes harder to establish. In this chapter I will trace the presence in the prose poems of material which largely falls into the second of these two categories, even though Baudelaire was aware of some critical opinion which associated him with the first. The consternation he experienced on first realising that he was being accused of plagiarising Edgar Allan Poe is evident in his oft-cited comment from a letter he wrote in 1866:

Eh bien! On m'accuse moi, d'imiter Edgar Poe! Savez-vous pourquoi j'ai si patiemment traduit Poe? Parce qu'il me ressemblait. La première fois que j'ai ouvert un livre de lui, j'ai vu, avec épouvante et ravissement, non seulement des sujets rêvés par moi, mais des PHRASES, pensées par moi, et écrites par lui, vingt ans auparavant' (Duquette 2003, p.20).

The book he refers to in this quote is generally taken to be 'Le Chat noir', a translation by Isabelle Meunier in January 1847 of Poe's 'The Black Cat', although other imitations and translations of Poe's work had appeared in French periodicals during the preceding three years, including an imitation of 'William Wilson' in 1844. According to Baudelaire's friend and biographer, Asselineau, Baudelaire was deeply impressed by the work, recognising in Poe a kindred spirit. Asselineau's romanticised version of events recounts how Baudelaire, on first reading Poe's tale, has him immediately procuring a copy of the rest of his tales from the publishers, Wiley and Putnam, from which he translated 'Mesmeric Revelation', published in *La Liberté de Penser* in July, 1848. According to Asselineau, he then devoted himself to the task of translating all of Poe's work he could find in American periodicals for the next seventeen years (Bandy 1952, pp.65-66). However, W.T. Bandy contests this account, describing this first translation as a mediocre piece of work which attracted little attention, and claiming that Baudelaire only revived his interest in Poe when asked to write a study on 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages' for the *Revue de Paris* in April, 1852.

This 40-page study is significant in that it allowed W.T. Bandy to compile a list, in 1967, of Poe's works which were *not* known to Baudelaire in 1852. This included the greater part of his work and certainly most of his poetry, including

'The Raven', as well as most of his literary criticism and *The Philosophy of Composition*. Neither had Baudelaire read Poe's two longer works, *Eureka* and *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*, as well as about sixty of his tales. In fact, Baudelaire had had access to only twelve tales in Poe's collection of *Tales* (1845), published by Wiley and Putnam. This was supplemented by a selection of pieces of verse and prose from the *Southern Literary Messenger*, given to him by William Wilberforce Mann, an American residing in Paris between 1846 and 1856. In what way is this information relevant to the subject of Poe's influence on Baudelaire? From a letter to Ancelle, Baudelaire's solicitor, and from a statement to the same effect contained in Asselineau's biography of Baudelaire, it emerges that nearly all the poems which were published in the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, were written before 1850 (Bandy 1952, p.69). As a consequence, therefore, it is fair to say that most of the verse poems could not have been influenced by Poe's work. (Michaud sets this date as early as 1847 but concedes the possibility that Baudelaire could have revised *Les Fleurs du Mal* between 1847 and 1857, although he finds the case unproven (Michaud 1938, p.670).

Michaud also contends that Poe was not alone in his influence on Baudelaire, citing Delacroix, Wagner and De Quincey, with all of whom he claimed a resemblance. A telling insight into Baudelaire's views on literary

influence is contained in a passage of *La Fanfarlo* where the writer (and clearly Baudelaire's double), Samuel Cramer, after an intense period of reading, concludes, 'Voilà qui est assez beau pour être de moi! – et de là à penser: c'est donc de moi, - il n'y a que l'espace d'un tiret'. Alluding to Cramer, the passage continues: 'Il était à la fois tous les artistes qu'il avait étudiés et tous les livres qu'il avait lus, et cependant, en dépit de cette faculté comédienne, restait profondément original (*OCI*, pp.554-555). This quote neatly encapsulates Baudelaire's thinking on imitation, accepting that, unconsciously, he was influenced by everything he read but asserting firmly that this did not detract from his own originality. The passage pre-dates his reading of Poe's *The Philosophy of Composition* in which the American poet describes his construction of 'The Raven', claiming that the individual lines of the poem bore no claim to originality, but that only their combination into stanzas was new. Both authors strike the fine balance between imitation and originality.

The extent to which Poe influenced Baudelaire can only be assessed with confidence by establishing the latter's literary, aesthetic and psychological status before ever having heard of Edgar Allan Poe. In 1847 Baudelaire was known in literary circles as a poet, an art critic and a dandy. He had published the autobiographical novel 'La Fanfarlo' as well as his art criticism concerning the *Salon de 1846* and had read to the literary élite some of the poems that

would later form part of *Les Fleurs du Mal*; he was familiar with Romantic and pre-Romantic literature; he had experimented with hashish in order to explore “les paradis artificiels” (Michaud 1938, p668). According to Asselineau, “Il fut prématurement maître de son style et de son esprit” (Lemonnier, 1932, p.18). The painter Delacroix had impressed him with his ‘facultés étranges et étonnantes d’un grand génie malade de génie’ (Lemonnier 1932 p.16), a phrase which he later applied to Poe and which indicates that his taste for strangeness and decadence pre-dated his reading of Poe. It is worth looking closely at Baudelaire’s description of artistic creativity as it applied to Delacroix in 1846, before he had any knowledge of Poe’s philosophy.

Il n’y a pas de hasard dans l’art, non plus qu’en mécanique. Une chose heureusement trouvée est la simple conséquence d’un bon raisonnement, dont on a quelquefois sauté les déductions intermédiaires, comme une faute est la conséquence d’un mauvais principe (Lemonnier 1932, p.16).

Compare this to his translation of *The Philosophy of Composition* in April, 1859:

Mon dessein est de démontrer qu’aucun point de la composition ne peut être attribué au hasard ou à l’intuition, et que l’ouvrage a marché, pas à pas, vers sa solution, avec la précision et la rigoureuse logique d’un problème mathématique (Lemonnier 1932, p.17).

It is possible, of course, that Baudelaire might have deliberately manufactured a translation of this passage with the aim of achieving a closer resemblance to his 1846 quotation but a comparison with Poe's original passage shows that the translation is faithful to it, without any attempt by Baudelaire to artificially engineer a similarity:

It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition – that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem (Poe 1848, p.163).

Both Poe and Baudelaire compare the creative process to logical reasoning; both stress the absence of chance and intuition, and both hold that the final outcome is dependent on a sound initial premise. Although the first passage applies to painting and the second to poetry, it is entirely valid to recognise the remarkable similarity in their theories of artistic composition.

As early as 1932, Lemonnier had identified an affinity between the writers in so far as their works reflected the struggle between 'le spleen et l'idéal' (Lemonnier 1932, p.21) , a phrase symbolising the constant swing between the descent into melancholy and the aspiration for an unreachable, supernal beauty. But was this affinity wholly a matter of chance or is there a more rational explanation? The answer is that the literary circumstances existing for

both of them were broadly similar (Lemmonier 1932, pp.22-23). They came after the great Romantics, whether French like Lamartine, Vigny and Hugo, or English like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. The affinities can be explained to some extent, therefore, by their similar intellectual environments. They were both subject to the values of the Enlightenment, like rationalism and empiricism, which emerged in Europe and spread to the New World thanks to men like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Poe owed his taste for the macabre to Ann Radcliffe and to Matthew Lewis, two earlier exponents of Gothic horror, whom Baudelaire had also read before encountering Poe. The theory of correspondences and the need to attain the absolute through ecstasy were features of early nineteenth century Swedenborgianism, particularly popular in North America, France and England, which taught that all created things are forms and effects of specific aspects of divine love and wisdom and thus *correspond* on the material plane. In addition, the growing influence of science gave to both Poe and Baudelaire a taste for lucidity. Lastly, both were affected by a world-wide reaction against the humanitarianism of the French Revolution which pushed them in the direction of 'art for art's sake' (Lemmonier 1932, p.22). This doctrine was espoused notably by Théophile Gautier, whom Baudelaire eulogised in his eponymous essay, citing in particular his novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. Baudelaire describes this work

as 'cette espèce d'hymne à la Beauté'. In his opinion, its effect was 'd'établir définitivement la condition génératrice des oeuvres d'art, c'est-à-dire l'amour exclusive du Beau, l'*Idée fixe*' (OCII, p.111). Collectively, this led Michaud to conclude that the contention that Baudelaire's artistic theories came largely from Poe is unsustainable. It would mean that the richness and scope of the Frenchman's other artistic and literary sources would be disregarded. Moreover, Michaud (1938, p.671), asserts that Poe's theories of poetry were taken from Coleridge (who may have been influenced by Schlegel), so it is difficult to identify precisely the extent of Poe's own originality.

Regardless of the case for affinity between the two authors on an artistic level, it can be made on the psychological level. Their personal affinity was, at least initially, based on a fanciful construction by Baudelaire of Poe's persona, based on incomplete and sometimes erroneous information. On first learning of Poe's existence, the picture Baudelaire's imagination had created was of an elegant life in which the rich and happy Edgar took to writing, in the midst of many other occupations. When he learned of Poe's real situation, including the loss of his parents at an early age, the premature death of his young wife, his precarious financial circumstances and his problem with alcohol, his admiration turned to pity. It was with this version of the American author that Baudelaire was able to identify, but it was an image he enhanced to suit his

own purposes. The partially fabricated version of Poe that Baudelaire constructed set the American at odds with his own country in which material progress was given the highest priority, and in which artistic expression was undervalued – thereby simply extending to Poe in America what Baudelaire had experienced in France. Baudelaire blamed Poe's country for his woes but, in reality, it was the French author's own displaced horror of America that accounted for his biographical fabrications. Michaud (1938, p.669) contends that before his discovery of Poe, Baudelaire's psychology was fixed. He was in his mid-twenties and in full possession of his life, his art and his poetry but it suited his purposes to use Poe to construct a personal portrait of himself. Lemonnier (1932, p.52) concludes that Baudelaire 'a donc grîmé Poe d'une main savante'. Michaud (1938, p.669) explains this a few years later in Freudian terms: 'En peignant Poe, c'est lui-même qu'il peint avec son subconscient morbide, ses hantises et ses pures aspirations'.

Baudelaire's admiration for Poe's work was so intense that he set himself the task of translating his work even though, at the beginning, his knowledge of English was far from perfect – hence T.S. Eliot's comment that there was no evidence that Baudelaire actually *spoke* the language at all (Eliot 1949, p.336). By his own admission he regarded his very first translation, 'La Révélation Magnétique', as being written in 'un français pénible et parfois baroque' (*OCII*,

p.249). He began with a variety of tales published in newspapers like the *Revue de Paris*, but these were then published as collections in *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856), *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1857), *Les Aventures de Arthur Gordon Pym* (1857) and *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses* (1865). The translations were an immediate success, one critic going as far as to say that they were as remarkable as the original text (Emile Deschanel in Faber 1989, p.254). It is not surprising, therefore, that at this stage in his career, his public recognition came largely from his status as the translator of Edgar Poe, rather than through his own literary output. Crucially, the benefits of this practice went beyond the much-needed source of income that it provided. As Barnstone (1993 cited in Wallaert 2012, p.72) explains: 'To translate the work of another poet affords the translator other experience, diction, prosody, which may soon enter his or her own work' or, more simply, 'Translation is the teacher of poets'. Barnstone calls it 'a self-reflexive labour' because the poet not only learns his craft from his work as a translator, but is inevitably influenced, not in the first place by the source author, but by his own texts which he creates as a translator.

Baudelaire's organisation of his translations of Poe's tales into two volumes, *Histoires Extraordinaires* (1856) and *Nouvelles Histoires*

Extraordinaires (1857), illustrates well his understanding of his reading public.

According to Quinn:

the first volume was designed as bait for the public: tricks, divination, leg-pulls, etc. (contained in tales like 'Une descente dans le Maelstrom', 'Le Scarabée d'or' and 'Metzengerstein'). The second volume is of a loftier kind of fantastic: hallucinations, mental illness, pure grotesque, supernaturalism, etc. - contained in 'Le Chat noir', 'Le Démon de la perversité' and 'La Chute de la maison Usher' (Quinn 1957, p.112)

The fact that this turned out to be an extremely effective marketing strategy, resulting in a worldwide readership for both collections, testifies to Baudelaire's recognition that there were different levels of readership that he needed to satisfy in order to achieve commercial success. This was exactly the policy that Poe had adopted in America to ensure the maximum circulation for his tales. He targeted, on the one hand, a large mass audience addicted to the somewhat tawdry melodrama of people caught in impossible predicaments like being buried alive – those readers seeking the sensational. On the other hand, he wanted to reach a small coterie of perceptive readers who could enjoy the sly satire insinuated into such tales. There was, therefore, a fine judgement to be made in regard to the subtlety of his approach. (On at least one occasion Poe misjudged the level of subtlety required to appreciate his

ideas. A submission to Harpers Bros. publishers in 1836 was rejected on the basis that his tales would be understood and relished only by a very few. The letter of rejection states that 'the number of readers in this country capable of appreciating and enjoying such writings... is very small indeed' (Quinn 1941, p.251).

In the opinion of T.S. Eliot, Baudelaire transformed what was often 'a slipshod and shoddy English prose into admirable French' (Eliot 1949, p.336), suggesting that Baudelaire's translations were an improvement on the original tales. Undoubtedly, devotion and talent were essential to this success, but Faber argues that it was also the nature of the subject matter, the presence of certain linguistic quirks in his style, and the differences in the grammatical and sound systems of the two languages, that accounted for the fact that Poe reads better in French than in English (Faber 1989, p.254). She refers to the absence of pictures and scenes of nineteenth century America in his writing. He creates his pictures from Gothic materials as in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and deliberately avoids correspondence with the real world. For instance, 'Usher' contains no place names nor any clue as to the geographical location of the mansion, simply a description of the landscape features of the domain and the bleakness of the house. This accords with Poe's view of art as 'the reproduction of what the senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the

soul' (Poe 1846, p.337). It amounts to a rejection of the principle of imitation in Art – exactly the same point that Baudelaire makes in *Le Peintre de la vie modern* (OCII, p.698). Fortunately, for the translation process, the consequences of this are that the lack of specific cultural references in Poe's works facilitates its transferral to other languages by minimising the potential loss of information.

Poe's writing style also lends itself to the process of translation. His prose often seems overdone, occasionally to the point of grandiloquence. According to Faber:

His myriad use of adjectives and postnominal phrases, the length and complexity of his sentences, the frequent insertion of Latin, Greek and French words make his style as affected as that of an eighteenth-century English essayist (Faber 1989, p.255).

To an Anglo-Saxon reader accustomed to short sentences and a certain sobriety of style this can be off-putting, but it is this very flowery elegance of language which make it suitable for translation into French. For example, when describing the atmosphere of the mansion and the domain in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' he refers to it as, 'a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued' (Faber 1989, p.255). Baudelaire translates this as, 'une vapeur mystérieuse et pestilentielle, à peine visible, lourde,

paresseuse et d'une couleur plombée (Baudelaire 1857, p.136). In Epstein's view (1980 cited in Faber 1989, p.256) Poe's frequent use of this stylistic feature (postnominal modification) which is, in English, a stylistic deviation used to achieve a poetic effect, becomes tiresome to the reader and cancels out the intended effect. However, this is exactly the word order that the French reader would expect, so that in Baudelaire's translation the postnominal positioning of the adjectives ceases to be a stylistic deviation, and is consequently more pleasing to the ear.

In a similar vein, the translation of Poe's archaisms, which are intended to produce a conscious effect of poeticity, but which, in reality, often sound affected and out-dated, achieve a more acceptable interpretation in the target language. The following passage appears in 'Morella' (Faber 1989, p.256):

The days have never been when thou couldst love me but her whom in life thou didst abhor, in death thou shalt adore ... Morella! How knowest thou this?

In Baudelaire's translation this becomes:

Ils n'ont jamais été, ces jours où il t'aurait été permis de m'aimer; - mais celle que, dans la vie, tu abhorras, dans la mort tu l'adoreras ... Morella! Comment sais-tu cela?

In this case the French reader is spared the archaic use of terms because there are no equivalents for the English biblical pronouns and verbs. Moreover, the target language's word order matches that of modern French. The combined effect is to remove the archaisms from the original, resulting in a more familiar sound for the French reader. Certainly, Baudelaire's translations are helped by his close identification with Poe, to the extent that in the American author's work, he found his own. Blackmur (1960 cited in Faber 1989 p.257) went as far as claiming that Baudelaire made Poe into a great writer by giving his writing, in French, the authority and the genuineness to which it never pretended in English.

The self-reflexive imitation which Baudelaire practised in his translations of Poe is well illustrated in his approach to the translation of neologisms. Burton R. Pollin (1974 cited in Wallaert 2012, p.71) found nine hundred and fifty-four words created by Poe which, either do not feature in the Oxford English Dictionary, or for which Poe's is the first, first-dated, or only occurrence. Many of these new words appear in the texts which Baudelaire translated, while others occur in texts which he is certain to have read. Poe's neologisms were often formed by prefixation of a past participle as in 'bemystified' and 'enjeweled' or by suffixation as in 'busybodyism' (Wallaert 2012, pp.74-75). Occasionally, his neologisms were semi-onomatopoeic as in 'bugaboo',

referring to tales which were intended to be frightening (like ‘Premature Burial’). Whatever their means of formulation, they were often put to good purpose in his literary criticism, reviews and tales, as a means of sharpening his sarcasm, enhancing his use of irony, or deepening his parodies. Sometimes, they were an expression of sheer playfulness, as in his use of ‘frogpondians’ (Isaak 2020, p.85) to denigrate Emerson’s group of Transcendentalists.

The challenge for Baudelaire was to render their meanings as faithfully as possible in his own language and he did this in two ways (Wallaert, 1989):

1. By using an explanatory phrase
2. By creating an equivalent French neologism

The first of these methods can be illustrated by his translation of a sentence which occurs half-way through the first paragraph of ‘The Imp of the Perverse’:

It cannot be denied that phrenology and, in great measure, all
metaphysicianism have been concocted a priori (Wallaert 1989, p.75).

Baudelaire translated this as:

Il est impossible de nier que la phrénologie et une bonne partie des
sciences métaphysiques ont été brassées a priori.

In this example he played safe by rejecting the ‘foreignness’ of Poe’s neologism. Baudelaire’s ‘sciences métaphysiques’ is a neutral translation

which, although it explains the term ‘métaphysicianism’, loses all of the mockery intended by Poe. The second method of translation of this neologism would have been to create an equivalent French neologism, ‘métaphysicianisme’, but Baudelaire chose not to opt for this alternative. He may have lacked the necessary confidence to match Poe’s pioneering approach at this stage of his translating career, or he may have felt that the French language lacked the flexibility to accommodate this new word.

In ‘Mesmeric Revelation’ the following phrase occurs (Wallaert 2012, p.77):

[...] for mind, existing unincorporate, is merely God.

Baudelaire’s translation is:

[...] car l’esprit existant incorporellement, c’est Dieu.

The word ‘incorporellement’ is a neologism and its use in this translation achieves a reproduction of the original effect, involving no change in register or tone. The same strategy of constructing a target language calque is used to translate ‘unparticled’ – *imparticulée*, and ‘unindividualised’ – *désindividualisé*. In these cases, he produced Frenchified copies of the source text terms and maintained the meaning and the effect in the target text. Evidently, Baudelaire felt that he had to imitate Poe’s neologisms if he was going to be consistent with his overall strategy of close translation.

A more telling indication that he had learnt much from the translation process was that Baudelaire then went on to construct his own neologisms where there were no corresponding neologisms in Poe's text. There is a passage in 'The Pit and the Pendulum' where the narrator describes the awakening from slumber and the passing from psychological into physical consciousness (the second stage):

It seems probable that if, upon reaching the second stage, we could recall the impressions of the first, we should find these impressions eloquent in memories of the gulf beyond (Wallaert 2012, p.79).

This was translated as follows:

Il semble probable que si, en arrivant au second degré, nous pouvions évoquer les impressions du premier, nous y retrouverions tous les éloquents souvenirs du gouffre *transmondain*.

The last word in the sentence, 'transmondain', is a neologism where a more literal alternative could have been used eg. 'le gouffre de l'au-delà'. In this case, in contrast to his usual policy, it seems Baudelaire chose to increase the foreignness of his translation when a standard phrase would have sufficed.

Whether Baudelaire opted for a standardisation or for a calque, it seems that the overall effect was to liberate his lexical creativeness beyond his

translations, and into his own writing. His invention of the word, 'spectrale', whilst translating Poe's 'The Gold Bug' ('Le Scarabée d'or') illustrates this development. In this tale Poe writes (Wallaert 2012, p.82):

His countenance was pale even to ghastliness, and his deep-set eyes glared with unnatural lustre.

Baudelaire's translates this as:

Son visage était d'une pâleur *spectrale*, et ses yeux, naturellement fort enfoncés, brillaient d'un éclat surnaturel.

Although the word, 'spectrale', appears completely familiar to the modern reader, its first recorded use in French was in Baudelaire's *Histoires Extraordinaires* which appeared in 1856 and includes 'Le Scarabée d'or'. The implication is that his translation choices became more daring as his translation of Poe progressed. Inevitably, this influenced his own writing. In the case of his neologism, 'spectrale', it appears again in 'Le Flacon' (*Les Fleurs du Mal*):

Il la terrasse au bord d'un gouffre séculaire,
Où, Lazare odorant déchirant son suaire,
Se meut dans son réveil le cadavre *spectral*,
D'un vieil amour ranci, charmant et sépulcral.

Though 'spectral' serves as only one example, some of Baudelaire's neologisms that occur in other texts, (most of which were written *after* he had translated the bulk of Poe's work), are clearly inspired by his work on Poe. In several of his works of literary criticism Baudelaire uses neologisms which seem to come directly from his readings of Poe, including from texts that he did not translate for publication.

In illustration of this technique, Baudelaire's neologism, 'didactisme', is clearly related to Poe's word 'didacticism' which was coined by the American and used frequently by him. In *The Poetic Principle* (1850), Poe discusses 'the heresy of The Didactic' (Poe 1850, p.6) to describe the approach to literature which smacked of teaching and moralising. Much of this essay was incorporated in Baudelaire's 'Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe' (*OCII*, p.319), *without* citing Poe's work. He used the word at the end of his 'Notes diverses sur l'Art philosophique' (1860) in the note, 'Didactisme en poésie et en peinture' (*OCII*, p.607) and it subsequently played a central role in his poetic theory. (Like Poe, he regarded didacticism as the worst of heresies). It seems, therefore, that Baudelaire's decade-long labour in translating Poe was a kind of poetic rehearsal, a place in which he could freely practice the lexical creativity which he could then apply to his other work. Wallaert (2012, p.85) describes this as a process of 'self-reflexive imitation'.

Where Poe influenced Baudelaire most deeply, in Culler's view, was in the *Petits poèmes en prose* (Culler 1990, p.5). What he admired about Poe's short stories was their focus on the really important issues, those that were worthy of the attention of a poet, such as mental disturbance, the eccentrics and the pariahs of this world, and his symbolic use of farce. In his 'Etudes sur Poe' he describes the American's style as, 'serré, concaténé' (OCII, p.283), one which 'supprime les accessoires'... (OCII, p.282). He goes on to write:

'De plus, l'auteur d'une nouvelle a à sa disposition une multitude de tons, de nuances de langage, le ton raisonneur, le sarcastique, l'humoristique, que répudie la poésie, et qui sont comme des dissonances, des outrages à l'idée de beauté pure (OCII, p.330).

'Le Galant Tireur' (OCI, p.349) constitutes a prime example of this condensed style. It consists of a short, third-person narrative, concerning a man who stops his carriage at a shooting range in the middle of a wood in order to kill time – 'de tirer quelques balles'. His wife mocks his inability to hit the target. Stung by the insult, he spots a nearby doll with its nose in the air and a haughty expression, and asks her to imagine herself as the doll. His next shot decapitates the doll, and he thanks her for his skilfulness. The general organisation of the piece reveals how Baudelaire is determined to proceed with an affected simplicity which, nonetheless, below the surface, conceals a

more complex range of ideas. It is the latter reading which makes the piece a poem in the proper sense of the term – that is, a text deliberately constructed to disconcert and challenge the reader, rather than cater to a need for harmless entertainment. Accordingly, it is possible to show, therefore, how the text manages to incorporate two complementary readings, one literal and quite clearly readable, recounting an amusing anecdote, and another more obscure reading in which both the form and the intentions are more difficult to tease out.

On a literal reading of the poem, therefore, ‘Le Galant Tireur’ is merely an amusing anecdote relating to the oppressive nature of time and ‘ennui’ which were persistent concerns in Baudelaire’s poetry. A casual reader of *La Presse* in 1862 might enjoy the black humour of the poem and be amused by the use of the doll as the indirect target of the marksman when, in reality, he would assume that the wife was the intended target. Perhaps this reader might reflect on the relationship between the couple and compare it with their own relationship. However, a more thoughtful and discerning reader might interpret the poem as an attack on the public that mocked Baudelaire’s verse poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Such a reader might see the decapitation of the doll as an indirect execution of themselves as part of that audience.

The structure of the poem is such that the beginning prefigures the end, a technique recommended by Poe in *The Philosophy of Composition* (Poe 1846, p.165). However, the poem opens in the middle of the plot (*in media res*), which was unusual for the literature of the time. It begins with the phrase, 'Comme la voiture traversait le bois', thereby plunging the reader directly into the action as it happens and implying that the narrator assumes the reader is fully aware of the preceding events whereas, in reality, they are ignorant of all that has gone before (Gouvard 2014. p.175). Baudelaire would have been familiar with this technique from his reading of Poe's 'The Pit and the Pendulum', a tale translated by Baudelaire as 'Le Puits et le Pendule', and included in his 1857 collection of *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*. The opening sentence in Poe's tale is as follows:

I was sick – sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me' (WLC, p.190).

The use of the imperfect tense of the verbs in 'I was sick' and 'my senses were leaving me', heightens the sense of the reader witnessing events as they unfold. Staying true to this strategy, Baudelaire translated the first sentence of 'The Pit and the Pendulum' as follows:

J'étais brisé, - brisé jusqu'à la mort par cette longue agonie; et, quand enfin ils me délièrent et qu'il me fut permis de m'asseoir, je sentis que mes sens m'abandonnaient (Baudelaire 1857, p.158).

The use of the verbs in the imperfect sense – *étais* and *abandonnaient* in the tale and *traversait* in the prose poem - immediately involve the reader in the action as it is happening even though they are unaware of the events leading up to the scene described. It is possible that, in reading Poe's tale, Baudelaire was so impressed by this technique that he decided to adopt it as one of his own in his repertoire of opening lines, amongst which the first sentence of 'Mademoiselle Bistouri' is a notable example:

Comme j'arrivais à l'extrémité du faubourg, sous les éclairs du gaz, je sentis un bras qui se coulait doucement sous le mien, et j'entendis une voix qui me disait à l'oreille: "Vous êtes médecin, monsieur?" (*OCI*, p.353)

Another example is contained in 'La Fausse Monnaie', which opens with: 'Comme nous nous éloignons du bureau de tabac, mon ami fit un soigneux triage de sa monnaie; ...' (*OCI*, p.323). In both cases Poe's style is apparent in Baudelaire's prose poems although it is difficult to know whether this should be attributed to conscious imitation or unconscious influence.

In describing the scene of 'Le Galant Tireur', the terms 'la voiture' and 'le bois' are used in a manner which suggests that the narrator expects the reader to ascribe a specific referent to each term. It might be, for instance, that the reader supposes the wood to be 'le bois de Boulogne'. However, for the purposes of the poem it is sufficient that the personalities described are likely to be city-dwellers, and that the usual location for a 'tir' was just outside the walls of a city, for the reader to be able to complete the picture. The advantage of this deliberate vagueness is that it removes the action from any particular geographical or historical setting (in the same way that Poe excludes all identifiable references from tales like 'Usher'), which then gives the prose poem a position outside of space and time, emphasising its status as a poem and not as a tale set in a readily identifiable era and setting.

The lack of specifics extends also to the protagonists (Gouvard 2014, p.176). The male protagonist in 'Le Galant Tireur' (*OCI*, p.349) is designated from the start by the pronoun 'il', suggesting that the reader has some foreknowledge of his identity, yet that information does not exist either within the poem itself or within any previous poem in the collection. Again, in the second paragraph, the man is simply referred to as 'celui-ci' without any further description. The reader is therefore required to 'construct' the identity of the male actor, using what little information they have been given. His wife,

‘à laquelle il doit tant de plaisirs, tant de douleurs...’, is described as ‘chère, délicieuse et exécrable’, the last of these words pointing to some tension in the relationship. In fact, the relationship between the protagonists is the nub of the poem, to the exclusion of irrelevant biographical details beyond those that have a bearing on that relationship. This practice of paring to the bone whatever narrative exists in the prose poem illustrates well Suzanne Bernard’s principle of ‘densité’ - that combination of concentration and intensity which Hiddleston understands to be an essential component of poetic excellence (Hiddleston 1987, p.87). Although, the hundred and ninety-five words of this prose poem constitute an excellent example of poetry ‘à l’état pur’ as envisaged by Valéry (1924, p.24), it required from Gouvard an essay of six thousand words to do justice to the kaleidoscope of reflections that it generated (Gouvard 2014, pp.173-182).

The deliberate avoidance of a specific time and place is also recognisable in tales like Poe’s ‘Berenice’ which Baudelaire translated in his *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1857). The first-person narrator gives almost nothing away in terms of personal detail – ‘My baptismal name is Egaeus; that of my family I will not mention’. There follows a description of the ‘gloomy, gray, hereditary halls’ in which he and Berenice grew up. But this tale of gothic horror in which the narrator describes how he extracts the teeth from Berenice, his

prematurely buried fiancée, would gain nothing from the mention of names, places and times recognisable to the reader. Indeed, it is possible that calling to mind real locations and times would detract from the scenes visualised by the reader, preventing them from making their own act of completion. Poe leaves the reader to imagine the character of the time-honoured family mansion from the few details given of the claustrophobic environment in which both the narrator and Berenice were raised.

The technique of setting the scene in terms of mood and atmosphere to the exclusion of specifics is also applied by Poe in the introduction to his tale, 'Ligeia', included in Baudelaire's *Histoires Extraordinaires* (1856). The first sentence reads:

I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the Lady Ligeia. . . Yet I believe that I met her first and most frequently in some large, old, decaying city near the Rhine.

Given that the Rhine is a river over eight hundred miles in length, running through forty cities, many of which, at some stage in their history, would answer to the description 'decaying', it is fair to say that this leaves the location firmly in the mind of the reader and that the narrator is seeking to fix a bearing on the atmosphere rather than the place or time.

The similarities between Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd' (published in 1857 in *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires* – p.99) and the prose poem 'Les Foules' (published in *Le Spleen de Paris* in 1869, p.291), are particularly striking. Poe sets the scene in a London café where the narrator, convalescing from a serious illness, is studying the passers-by. His state of convalescence gives rise to a heightened sense of awareness – 'I felt a calm but inquisitive interest in everything' (WLC, p.208). Although he glimpsed each face only briefly, his peculiar mental state meant that, 'I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years' (WLC, p.210). Eventually his curiosity is taken up irresistibly by a 'decrepit old man', and he wonders to himself, 'How wild a history is written in that bosom!' (WLC, p.211). The rest of the tale describes his pursuit of the man until 'It will be in vain to follow' (WLC, p.213).

In *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), Baudelaire takes up the theme of the convalescent. As part of his eulogy of Constantin Guys he compares the painter to an eternal convalescent who has the same intense interest in everything, as does a young child: 'Or, la convalescence est comme un retour vers l'enfance... L'enfant voit tout en *nouveauté*; il est toujours *ivre*. ... pour un homme-enfant ... aucun aspect de la vie n'est émoussé' (OCII, pp.690-691). This 'ivresse' of curiosity and participation would subsequently be a major

driving force in Baudelaire's prose poems. In *Les Foules* 'le promeneur solitaire et pensif tire une singulière ivresse de cette universelle communion' (*OCI*, p.291). This short poem focuses on the narrator's 'incomparable privilège' to enter 'dans le personnage de chacun' in the same way that Poe was able to read the history of long years in a brief glance. This incomparable privilege is used to good advantage in 'Les Fenêtres' where, using only the glimpse of a prematurely aged woman through a closed window, he is able to construct 'l'histoire de cette femme' (*OCI*, p.339). In this case the narrator is on the outside looking in, but the same self-satisfaction is evident in his ability to create a whole life story from the brief interval of a glance.

The same tendency to be stimulated and inspired by Poe's themes is apparent in comparing 'The Imp of the Perverse' with Baudelaire's 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' (*OCI*, p.285) Poe's tale discusses the overwhelming tendency man has to do wrong for wrong's sake. The fact that this undeniable human attribute has no recognisable evolutionary advantage, makes it no less compelling a driving force. Although Baudelaire's belief in original sin came from his reading of de Maistre, the concept of perversity that he reads in Poe sits well with his already jaundiced view of human nature. However, it is in the construction of 'The Imp of the Perverse' where the American's influence is most apparent. The build-up to the dénouement starts with the banal description of a man in

conversation with another, where he ‘tantalizes the listener by indulging himself in deliberate circumlocution’ (WLC, p.263). The story moves on to the relatively innocent human weakness of procrastination, of leaving important tasks until the next day...and then the next day ... until the opportunity has gone. Finally, the narrator recalls the unaccountable urge to throw oneself off, when standing at the edge of a precipice. It is the very thought which produces the danger – ‘To indulge, for a moment, in any attempt at *thought*, is to be inevitably lost’ (WLC, p.264).

Suddenly, the deliberately prolix nature of the tale so far, is instantaneously cut short, to reveal that the narrator is a condemned murderer in his prison cell. The reader, shaken from his state of quiet contemplation to one of astonishment, is henceforth addressed directly in the first person, and forced to recognise the enormity of the situation. The narrator goes on to reveal that all went well for years after the deed, and his crime would never have been detected had he not, whilst wandering along the street, pronounced the words, “I am safe- I am safe – yes – if I not be fool enough to make open confession!”. But it was this very thought which then produced the confession: ‘The long-imprisoned secret burst forth from my soul. They say I spoke with a distinct enunciation... before concluding the brief but pregnant sentences that consigned me to the hangman and to hell’ (WLC, p.265).

The similarities with Baudelaire's 'Le Mauvais Vitrier' are immediately apparent. It starts with an equally rambling series of examples of unaccountable human behaviour, like the procrastination which prevents the recipient from opening a letter until a fortnight after receiving it; the deliberate lighting of a cigar next to a powder keg to tempt destiny; the action of a habitually shy individual in throwing himself into the embrace of a startled passer-by. Half-way through the poem, as in the 'Imp', the narrator suddenly reverts to a first-person address and recounts the tale of his own perversity, in which he invites a passing vitrier up to his sixth floor appartement, only to be disappointed by his lack of suitable glass. He drops a plant pot on the vitrier as he leaves the building, shattering his glass panes. The perpetrator of this gratuitous action is a habitually law-abiding resident who somehow feels the urge 'à faire quelque chose de grand' (OCII, p.286). He is the victim of 'une inspiration fortuite ... qui nous pousse sans resistance vers une foule d'actions dangereuses ou inconvenantes' in the same way that Poe's murderer felt the irresistible urge to confess his crime.

Poe's depiction of women in his stories ranges from the ideal to the loathsome. In his short story, 'Ligeia', he describes at great length the beauty and the learning of his wife of that name. For Poe there was always some strangeness in beauty which enhanced its intensity. He was indebted to Bacon

for this observation. (It was an aspect of beauty which Baudelaire also felt was essential). As with most of the women in Poe's short stories, Ligeia becomes sick and dies. He revels in recollections of his ideal Ligeia, but takes consolation in a second wife, the Lady Rowena. This turns out to be a disastrous marriage in which 'she shunned me and loved me but little' (*WLC*, p.101). In return 'I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man'. In turn Rowena becomes sick and takes to her deathbed. Repeatedly, she gives every appearance of having died but revives. Throughout this time the narrator 'is sunk into visions of Ligeia' (*WLC*, p.104), and during Rowena's death throes, the narrator sees with horror Ligeia struggling to return in her successor's body.

There are obvious parallels with Ligeia in Baudelaire's 'Laquelle est la vraie?', although the prose poem is presented with less poignancy and more comedy. The subject of this poem is Bénédicte, the ideal of feminine beauty. But as with all Poe's ideal women, 'cette fille miraculeuse était trop belle pour vivre longtemps' (*OCI*, p.342). When she dies it is the narrator who buries her, but as he is gazing on the freshly covered grave a small person appears there, bearing an unmistakeable resemblance to the deceased. She cries out hysterically, "C'est moi, la vraie Bénédicte!" and claims to be an infamous scoundrel. She threatens to punish the narrator for his blindness and folly in

loving the ideal Bénédicta, by condemning him to love her as she now presents herself. His response is to stamp on the grave so violently that his leg sinks into the earth up to the knee and he remains attached, perhaps forever, “à la fosse de l’idéal”. In this prose poem Baudelaire generates a narrative by taking literally the idea of being attached to an ideal (just as Poe does in ‘Ligeia’), but chooses to do it symbolically by the use of farce.

Clearly, the difference between literary *imitation* and *influence* is one of degree. At its most extreme the first of these can amount to flagrant plagiarism and there are examples where that accusation can be fairly levelled at Baudelaire. He was guilty of lifting wholesale, some sections of Poe’s, *The Poetic Principle*, for use in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, and his preface to *Histoires Extraordinaires* is largely composed of biographical information on Poe in which he simply appropriated the work of American writers from articles in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Although, at the time, the general approach to plagiarism was more relaxed, especially when it happened to be transcontinental, it has to be accepted that Baudelaire was not above this practice.

At the other end of the scale, as Baudelaire writes in *La Fanfarlo*, “Il était à la fois tous les artistes qu’il avait lus” (*OCl*, p.555). In other words, he was influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by all the writers whose work he had

read, as is the case with any author. Even when there appear to be statements or observations in Baudelaire's work which bear all the hallmarks of Poe, it is often the case that their origins can be traced back to the American's Anglo-Saxon forerunners, such as Coleridge or Bacon. Nevertheless, it remains true that Baudelaire was heavily influenced by Poe because he identified with him, and he recognised himself in Poe's work. A simple inspection of the chronology of both authors' works, together with the evidence of his contemporaries, leads to the conclusion that the influence on *Les Fleurs du Mal* was much less marked than on his literary theory and his later art criticism. It is, however, evident from the above research that Poe had a major influence on Baudelaire's prose poems.

One of those influences took the form of deep irony – of hoodwinking the audience by stating propositions in apparent sincerity, whilst intending their meanings to be entirely the reverse of those advanced on a surface reading. Poe was particularly adept at this practice – in several cases writing whole tales which, although appearing plausible on a casual reading, were in fact carefully constructed hoaxes. In his *Etudes sur Poe*, Baudelaire recognised Poe's skill in hoaxing the public with tales which, while appearing completely credible, drew them into a web of deception. Some of his tales were self-evidently farcical, such as 'The Balloon-Hoax,' 'Mesmeric Revelation' and 'The Unparalleled

Adventure of One Hans Pfaall', but some were more credible, if stretching the imagination to a large extent. His novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, falls into this latter bracket, even though Poe claimed it was based on the life of a real person. Baudelaire admired Poe's capacity for farce but there are several examples of Poe's work in which the irony is so subtle that the work becomes a hoax; the circle of understanding readers is consciously limited, and the casual reader becomes part of the butt of the satire. The problem which arises for expert hoaxers, amongst which Poe is pre-eminent, is that all of their sincere works are then viewed with suspicion in case they also have been written with tongue firmly in cheek.

Certainly, Poe's essay on the theory of poetry, *The Philosophy of Composition*, has met with some scepticism. It purports to be a step-by-step description of the method he used to compose 'The Raven', in which he claimed that his starting point was the poem's dénouement. By his own account, he then worked backwards in a logical sequence to produce a poem of one hundred and eight lines. Poe asserts that, 'no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition – that the work proceeded step by step to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem' (Poe 1846, p.163). This was a complete rejection of the widespread assumption that poets composed their

poems by 'a species of fine frenzy – an ecstatic intuition' (Poe 1846, p.163). He describes in clear steps how he decided on the raven as a non-human creature capable of speech (after having first considered a parrot), and how he came to fix on 'Nevermore' as the poem's refrain. He claims that this word was impossible to overlook, since it had a 'long "o" as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with "r" as the most producible consonant' (Poe 1846, p.164).

Unfortunately, the impression left by this brilliant recipe for the construction of a poem, is that it is too good to be true. It reads like a *reconstruction* of a necessarily ill-defined, trial-and-error exercise which has been transformed with the aid of hindsight, into a more streamlined account of the process, as the poet would like it to have taken place. Was there really only one choice of word for the refrain? Did he really start at the end and work backwards? Was there ever any real possibility that 'The Raven' would be called 'The Parrot'? Even Daniel Hoffman, a renowned expert on Poe, confesses that he is unable to decide 'if the method has merit, or whether the whole show is a put-on' (Hoffman 1973 p.77). T.S. Eliot also had his doubts: 'It is difficult to read that essay without reflecting, that if Poe had plotted out his poem with such calculation, he might have taken greater pains over it: the result hardly does credit to the method' (Eliot 1948, p.333).

In Poe's penchant for hoaxing, Baudelaire recognised a skill which he could put to good use in his own work. In the aftermath of his 1857 trial, he was wary of incurring the wrath of the public who had reacted so vociferously against *Les Fleurs du Mal*. This feeling of antipathy towards the reading public, was shown in several prose poems, notably 'Le Chien et le flacon' (*OCl*, p.284). In a letter to his mother (5th June, *Mon coeur mis à nu*, 1863), he writes: 'Je tournerai contre la France entière mon réel talent d'impertinence. J'ai un besoin de vengeance comme un homme fatigué a besoin d'un bain' (Scott 2005, p.205). Without suggesting that the prose poems were written in order to wreak that vengeance, it is evident that the literary techniques of irony, satire, burlesque, parody, and downright hoaxing, were all employed in *Le Spleen de Paris* in order to ridicule those readers who were unable to fathom Baudelaire's subtlety. In 'L'Art romantique' (1852) he wrote, '*Le ridicule est plus tranchant que le fer de la guillotine*' (Scott 2005, p.205).

The opprobrium generated by *Les Fleurs du Mal* came as a result of the assumption many readers made that the 'je' of the narrator was the poet himself. In failing to distinguish between these two separate entities, they were under the impression that he, the author, was guilty of all the vices that his narrators had described in his collection of poems. As his friend, Asselineau, remarked, "Autant vaudrait accuser de régicide un peintre qui aurait

représenté la mort de César” (Crépet in Scott 2005, p.206n.17). Aware of his public persona, Baudelaire took advantage of it to parody himself, whilst still ensuring that the real target of his ridicule was his unsuspecting readership. By ironically allowing his narrators to adopt the values, beliefs and tastes of his audience, Baudelaire could ridicule those readers whilst distancing himself, as the author, from their views. Baudelaire took delight in being mistaken for his narrators, ‘Chaste comme le papier, sobre comme l’eau, porté à la dévotion comme une communiant, inoffensif comme une victime, il ne me déplairait pas de passer pour un débauché, un ivrogne, un impie et un assassin’ (Scott 2005, p.207).

If the above is true of *Les Fleurs du Mal* it is even more in evidence in *Le Spleen de Paris*. Wary of exacerbating the antagonism that had been generated by some of his verse poems in his trial, Baudelaire was at pains not to provoke further public animosity. What better way to disguise his resentment than by presenting his scathing opinions in the form of apparent acquiescence to bourgeois values when, below the surface, his object was to ridicule those values? The die was cast from the outset in his dedicatory letter, ‘A Arsène Houssaye’ (a classic representative of the bourgeoisie), where Baudelaire’s eulogy amounts to a hoax, and the irony continues in ‘Le Mauvais vitrier’ and ‘Assommons les pauvres!’, where the actions of the bourgeois narrators

constitute a veiled mockery of middle-class values. As Wayne Booth suggests, the reader of the prose poems has great difficulty in recognising when he is being duped:

If an author invents a speaker whose stupidities strike me as gems of wisdom, how am I to know that he is not a prophet? If his mock style seems like good writing to me, what am I to do? It would be a foolish man who felt sure that he could never mistake irony for straight talk.

(Booth in Scott 2005, p.207)

Even Baudelaire's contemporaries, like Fraisse, a journalist sympathetic to the author, with reference to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, remarked in September, 1857:

Après avoir lu le livre de M. Baudelaire, la première question que l'on se pose est celle-ci: L'auteur est-il sérieux? Son livre sort-il d'une imagination bizarre mais consciencieuse, ou n'est-il qu'une mystification colossale? Il n'est pas facile de répondre (Fraisse in Scott 2005, p.203).

The same quote is even more pertinent to prose poems like 'Assommons les pauvres!' which Compagnon (2014, p.27) estimated had attracted more critical commentary throughout the world than any other piece of French literature. Was the narrator seriously trying to restore the pride in a beggar by attacking him without reason? Or was it really a send-up of the bourgeois fashion for

books on self-improvement? The amount of debate generated suggests that there is no definitive answer to either question.

Although the fifty prose poems comprise a range of subjects, many of which were inspired by Baudelaire's experiences as a flâneur, it is possible to identify a structure common to roughly half of them which links them to Poe's tales. A pointer to this link is contained in the dedicatory letter, 'A Arsène Houssaye', in which Baudelaire lays claim to:

une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience? (*OCI*, pp.275-276).

It is this last phrase, 'aux soubresauts de la conscience', which is the key to a technique common to both Poe and Baudelaire in which the reader is jolted into a different state of mind by a turn of phrase, a change in tone, or a violent action that is sufficiently shocking to shake the reader out of their comfort zone and propel them into a different mode of thought. For Baudelaire this change is always from ideal to spleen. It never happens in the opposite direction. Neither Poe nor Baudelaire were exponents of the variety of poem in which the fundamental virtue and generosity of the human spirit were lauded. Often the final effect in their work was one of deep gloom and

melancholy. It is for this reason that Poe ridiculed Emerson's Transcendentalists who preached the idealism of man (Isaak 2020, p.85). In equal measure, Baudelaire castigated Rousseau's philosophy of man's natural goodness as well as the petty-bourgeois newspaper 'feuilletons' which perpetuated this belief (Scott 2005, pp.81-82).

Baudelaire's prose poem, 'La Chambre Double', is typical of the poems where 'un soubresaut' takes place. The ideal is represented by a wonderful room, the beauty of which is described at length by the narrator, and in which he is not subject to the dictates of Time. However, the reader learns that this "chambre véritablement spirituelle", is just the product of a dream from which the narrator is rudely awakened after a sleep induced by laudanum. The change in tone is signalled by the pivotal sentence, 'Mais un coup terrible, lourd, a retenti à la porte, et, comme dans les rêves infernaux, il m'a semblé que je recevais un coup de pioche dans l'estomac' (*OCI*, p.281). The scene is then transformed into the reality of his everyday existence, accompanied by all its mundane problems, whether it be an agent of the law serving a writ, a prostitute seeking payment, or an editor's errand boy sent to chase a newspaper article. The spleen is represented by the real room, a smelly hovel to which the brutal dictatorship of Time has returned, and in which the narrator must continue his life of servitude.

A similar 'soubresaut' is a feature of the prose poem 'Le Gâteau', in which the narrator is roaming in the Pyrenees. He feels in perfect peace with himself and the universe. Overtaken by hunger and fatigue after a long climb, he stops to rest and take a snack. Whilst cutting himself a slice of bread, he is approached by a rough looking youngster who makes it obvious that he would like some gâteau. Laughingly, the narrator offers the boy some bread which he grabs immediately in case the narrator changes his mind. Up to this point in the poem there is nothing to suggest anything other than an amusing and trivial anecdote. However, the scene is transformed by the words, 'Mais au même instant il fut culbuté par un autre petit sauvage' (*OCI*, p.298), which is the signal for a vicious fight between the two youngsters for possession of the slice. At the end of this violent scene the narrator's state of contented tranquillity has been transformed into one of sadness at the natural evil of the human condition which the incident has demonstrated.

The same kind of 'soubresauts de la conscience' are in evidence in some of Poe's tales. The dénouement of the 'The Premature burial' is a good example (*WLC*, p.251). This tale focuses on the widespread fear of being buried alive, which is a particular dread of the narrator, especially as he is subject to occasional cataleptic fits which render him unconscious and barely alive. He is reliant on his friends, who are aware of his propensity to fall into a trance-like

state, to guard against his 'inhumation' whilst still alive. The horror of such a fate drives him to take a series of elaborate precautions – he has the family burial vault remodelled so that it can be readily opened from within. A long lever is installed, on which the slightest pressure would cause the iron portals to fall back. Arrangements are made for free admission of air and light, and the coffin is warmly and softly padded. A bell is hung above the coffin with a rope attached which extends through a hole into the coffin. In short, at the slightest sign of life, the enclosed body would be able to be restored to the living world.

As in a self-fulfilling prophecy, the narrator ultimately finds himself enclosed in a space which has every sign of a closed coffin. He presumes that when absent from home he has fallen into a trance among strangers and they have buried him like a dog in a nameless grave. When this realisation takes hold of the 'innermost chambers' of his soul he is finally able to emit 'A long, wild, and continuous shriek, or yell, of agony' which 'resounded through the realms of the subterranean Night' (*WLC*, p.260). The shriek was met with, "Hillo! Hillo, there!" from a gruff voice, and then a second voice asked "What the devil's the matter now!". A third voice said, "Get out o' that!" The voices are those of the crew members of a sloop which had offered their hospitality when the narrator's gunning expedition, 'some miles down the banks of the James River', was overtaken by a storm. The coffin turned out to be a narrow

sailor's berth, for which no bedding had been provided, and which had the same dimensions as a coffin, but in which the narrator had found it possible to slumber. He is able assure the reader: 'From that memorable night, I dismissed forever my charnel apprehensions, and with them vanished the cataleptic disorder, of which, perhaps, they had been less the consequence than the cause' (*WCL*, p.261). The narrator's shriek and the sailors' response transport the reader from a state of terror to one of amused anti-climax – a 'soubresaut de la conscience' which may have influenced Baudelaire in the construction of his prose poems, although the latter's pessimistic outlook determined that the reader was always transported from a relatively serene state of mind into one of gloom, and never in the opposite direction.

In summary, Poe's influence took three forms. In the first case there was the conscious appropriation of Poe's work, a practice which was subject to less stigmatisation than in today's literary climate. (On an international scale plagiarism was facilitated by a notable lack of any copyright laws prohibiting the appropriation of authors' works between continents, such as America and Europe). Secondly, the process of translation over a period of at least ten years resulted in a familiarity with Poe's work which left a lasting impression on Baudelaire. A by-product of this process was that he was pushed into inventing new expressions for the purposes of translation which he then used later in his

own work and which Wallaert (2012, p.72) refers to as 'self-reflexive labour'.

Thirdly, there are several prose poems which owe a great deal to Poe's tales in terms of construction and theme, but which go beyond Poe's initial idea, producing works which genuinely bear the stamp of Baudelaire's originality.

CONCLUSIONS

The word 'influence' when applied to the impact that one author has on another covers a range of effects. At one extreme it can be used euphemistically to denote obvious imitation, but it can also be used to refer to the more subtle similarities of plot and style which are more difficult to assess. The latter influence can be exerted without the influenced author being fully aware of the effects. (Hence T.S. Eliot's disarmingly honest statement that he could not be sure whether his work had been influenced by Poe or not – Eliot 1949, p.327).

Baudelaire is candid about the debt he owes Poe in regard to poetic theory. He bases his essay, *Etudes sur Poe*, on *The Poetic Principle*, where he presents much of the American's poetic theory. Whilst he is clearly in support of Poe's proposals, there is no suggestion that he, himself, is the source of those ideas (*OCI*, p.333). Amongst the principles he attributes to Poe are his rejection of the epic form of poetry, and his opinion that a long poem is a contradiction in terms. Baudelaire's 'hérésie de l'enseignement' (*OCII*, p.333) echoes Poe's 'heresy of the didactic' (Poe 1850, p.1), which maintains that it is not the purpose of a poem to preach moral lessons. In fact, Baudelaire agrees with Poe's contention that a poem should be written solely for the poem's sake.

Neither is truth the object of the poem, since this is the preserve of the intellect. Baudelaire goes on to write: ‘...le principe de la poésie est, strictement et simplement, l’aspiration humaine vers une beauté supérieure, et la manifestation de ce principe est dans une enthousiasme, une excitation de l’âme’ (*OCII*, p.334). Again, Baudelaire is simply echoing Poe’s longing for a ‘supernal beauty’ – ‘the desire of the moth for the star’ (Poe 1850, p.1).

From Poe’s *The Philosophy of Composition*, Baudelaire draws further principles for his prose poems. These include the rejection of the theory that originality is the result of flashes of intuition rather than logical thinking (Poe 1846, p.163); that the most poetic of tones is ‘le ton mélancholique’ (*OCII*, p.335), an idea that Poe may have borrowed from Coleridge’s ‘Ode to Melancholy’ – 1820); the contention that all of the individual elements in the poem must tend towards the final dénouement, and that there must be an overall unity of effect (*OCII*, p.329). All of these are basic tenets of Baudelaire’s thinking on prose poems, and he gives Poe full credit for their influence on him.

There are examples in Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris* in which the French author must have been fully aware that he was using Poe’s work as a model. Baudelaire’s prose poem ‘Les Foules’ describes how, ‘Le promeneur solitaire...adopte comme siennes toutes les professions, toutes les joies et

toutes les misères que la circonstance lui présente' (*OCI*, p.291). This is exactly the theme used by Poe in the tale, 'The Man of the Crowd', as he sits at the window of a coffee house and observes the passers-by. His conclusion that 'I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years' (*WLC*, p.210), is drawn from his observations of all the professions that make up the crowd, from the clerks to the pick-pockets and the gamblers. No observant reader could mistake the similarities in the two pieces. Baudelaire makes no secret of his admiration for Poe's tale which he translated as 'L'Homme des foules' and describes its author as 'la plus puissante plume de cette époque' (*OCII*, p.689). Clearly imitating the Americans's description of the crowd, he states in his prose poem, 'Les Foules' that 'Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu'il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui' (*OCI*, p.291). At first glance, therefore, the evidence seems incontrovertible that Baudelaire has simply appropriated Poe's ideas on the crowd and the convalescent observer – an obvious case of conscious imitation. On further investigation into the origins of those ideas, the researcher finds that in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, the English poet describes the convalescent's enhanced sensibility to life as like that of a child – a helpless openness to unexpected sensations. He characterises genius as the capacity 'to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances which every day,

for perhaps forty years, had rendered familiar' (Stovall 1930, p.90).

Consequently, this closer inspection leads to the conclusion that, since Poe was an avid reader of Coleridge, the original source was probably not Poe, but his much-admired English contemporary.

The obvious parallels between Poe's 'Imp of the Perverse' (which Baudelaire translated as 'Le Démon de la Perversité', hence giving the title a more malevolent tone, lead to the conclusion that Baudelaire used this tale as a model for his prose poem, 'Le Mauvais Vitrier'. They have the same lengthy philosophical introduction, lulling the reader into a mood of calm reflection, followed by a 'soubresaut de la conscience', when the reader is shocked into a state of full awareness. This tactic is used again by Poe in 'The Black Cat', in which the banal description of an unremarkable and entirely happy state of married bliss, is suddenly interrupted by the narrator's decision to cut out the eye of his pet cat. Baudelaire was impressed by this dramatic effect because he uses it in 'La Corde', where the narrator returns to his studio in which he has taken on a young assistant, to find 'mon petit bonhomme, l'espiègle compagnon de ma vie' (*OCI*, p.329), has hanged himself in his absence. The same reversal of mood is brought about again in 'La Chambre Double' (*OCI*, p.280) where the narrator suddenly switches from the lyrical description of an ideal room to one of utter desolation. This technique of subjecting the reader

to 'un soubresaut de la conscience', is so deliberately planned and so characteristic of Poe that it bears all the hallmarks of conscious imitation by Baudelaire.

To the question, does Poe's influence on Baudelaire go beyond this conscious imitation and general agreement on poetic principles? the answer is undoubtedly yes. Baudelaire spent at least ten years carefully translating Poe's work in minute detail, occasionally correcting obscure factual errors, and sometimes producing work which was superior to the original (Quinn 1957, p.131). The result of such a commitment could hardly be any other than a strong, if unconscious, influence on the translator - an *assimilated* influence which also resulted in Baudelaire developing the quality of his own poems beyond that of his pre-Poe oeuvre.

An important factor in this unconscious influence was Poe's constant focus on the impression that his writing would make on the reader. Exactly who that reader might be, was an important factor in judging the capacity of the public to appreciate Poe's work. According to Hoffman (1973, p.83), Poe pitched his work at a level, 'not above the popular, while not below the critical, taste...'. In much of his work, therefore, he set out to please both the hoi polloi and the cognoscenti, an aim which, no doubt, had the approval of his editors.

Bieganowski makes the distinction between the rhetorical approach to Poe's

work, characteristic of a mass readership, and the dialectical approach, adopted by the more thoughtful readers (Bieganowski 1988, pp.175-187). It is this latter reading which Poe's work often engenders, whereby the reader is expected to make an act of completion, to read between the lines, in such a way that their settled view of the world is challenged, and they are forced to re-examine ideas they have taken for granted. Often this requires a willingness on the part of the reader to change their point of view, or at least be aware of opposing ideas. This, I believe, was the response that Baudelaire expected from his readers in his prose poems. They were expected to 'sniff out the substantial marrow' (Rabelais in Scott 2005, p.123) from the bones of his poetry, and to extract from it the hidden allegory. As with Poe, it was left to the reader to make their own act of completion. Poems like 'Un Plaisant', 'Assommons les pauvres!' and 'Le Galant Tireur' serve as examples of the way in which his prose poems can satisfy the needs of the casual, less discerning reader, on a surface level, but which open up a range of philosophical reflections for the reader who is able to engage more deeply. Often, those reflections related to what Baudelaire considered the false or superficial convictions of the bourgeoisie, such as their attitude to poverty or material progress.

The narration of Poe's tales was carried out in the first person, but the 'I' of the narrative was never the author himself. One of his greatest skills was to employ a stooge narrator to tell the tale, each tale requiring a different narrator with their own psychological make-up. In much the same way that a great actor can get inside the skin of their character, great writers are able to assume the identity of their narrators, even if their mental state is far from their own. Poe exemplifies this skill. For example, the narrator of 'The Tell-tale heart' is at pains to convince the reader that he is not mad by describing the logic he uses to justify murdering the old man. In admitting the crime, he is the victim of his own paranoia. This is not the same narrator of 'The Imp of the Perverse' who makes no attempt to justify his murder. He simply attributes his evil deed to the unaccountable need to do wrong for the sake of doing wrong. His admission of guilt is the result of his own perversity. Both narrators are mentally unstable, but in different ways, and both challenge the reader to reflect on the nature of evil. Although the author is responsible for creating the narrators, he is not to be held responsible for their deranged mentalities.

Baudelaire translated both tales and must have appreciated the way in which Poe could fashion his narrator to suit the tale. In *Le Spleen de Paris* the range of Baudelaire's narrators is equally diverse. They range from the artist of 'La Corde' to the poets of 'Le Vieux Saltimbanque' and 'Perte d'auréole' as well

as several representatives of the bourgeoisie in poems like 'Assommons les pauvres!', 'Le Joueur du pauvre' and 'Le Mauvais Vitrier'. Baudelaire was particularly skilful in assuming the role of the arrogant or hypocritical bourgeois in order to provoke reflection by the reader on class-related issues. It is a tribute to Baudelaire's skill as an author that many readers identified the narrator with the writer himself, a response which gave Baudelaire great satisfaction.

Quite apart from the conscious or unconscious influences that Poe had on Baudelaire, it remains true that much of the commonalities between Poe and Baudelaire were fundamental human qualities of temperament and intellect, which led to a rebelliousness and a need for distinction, rather than the literary similarities of style or content contained in their works. There was therefore an affinity between the two authors before Baudelaire was even aware of Poe's existence. This natural affinity can be explained, to some extent, by the parallels in their life stories. They both had the support of a strong mother figure; both authors had the benefit of a good education although their rebelliousness led each of them to be expelled at critical stages; both were cut off from their financial inheritance so that they were compelled to be self-sufficient, and had the constant problem of making ends meet. However, they both had the necessary self-belief and determination to pursue precarious

literary careers even when their personal circumstances became difficult. In Poe's case his self-belief is demonstrated by the ambition and self-confidence needed to embark on projects which would be deemed to be too challenging by most authors. This is illustrated by the fact that he had the audacity to set about the monumental task of explaining the existence of the universe. In the introduction to *Eureka: An essay on the material and spiritual universe*, he writes, 'I design to speak of the Physical, Metaphysical and Mathematical – of the Material and Spiritual Universe: of its Essence, its Origin, its Creation, its Present Condition and its Destiny' (Poe 1848, p.7).

Having defined the scale of the task, he then uses the theories of Aristotle, Newton and Kepler, as a basis to develop his own intuitive reasoning to explain the birth, death and re-birth of the universe. He believes his own imagination is equal to the principles set out by these giants of science – that truth is contained in poetry as much as it is in science. Describing his essay as a prose poem, he offers no apology for the lack of scientific evidence for his propositions and offers it as his most important work – claiming it to be of even greater significance than Newton's concept of gravity. Could there be any greater measure of Poe's self-belief than to place himself in this company? In *Eureka*, Poe makes no concessions to any limitations on the part of the reader who is faced with the daunting task of fathoming the blend of scientific and

intuitive reasoning presented by Poe's genius. Baudelaire pays tribute to the grandness of Poe's ambition in his 'Etudes sur Poe', where he eulogises not only his sincere works, like *Eureka* (OCII, p.287), but also the brilliance of his hoaxes, as in 'The Descent into the Maelström' and 'The Balloon-Hoax'.

It is this supreme self-confidence, even to the point of hubris, which is at the heart of Poe's hoaxing in his tales, as well as his novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, where the narrative cleverly traces the borderline between the possible and the implausible, and which leaves the reader with the uncomfortable feeling that they may have been spun a yarn. He employs the same technique of stretching credulity to the limit in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' in which the unlikely perpetrator of the crime turns out to be an orang-outang. The reader could be left with the feeling that they may have been duped by the narrator, and that the author has taken the reader for a fool.

If it is true that Baudelaire's admiration for Poe was inspired by a recognition of himself in the American, I contend that this relates to the self-belief that was intrinsic to both authors' mentality. Baudelaire's estimation of his own worth as a poet, is indicated by the last paragraph of the dedicatory letter to Arsène Houssaye in which, by creating his prose poems, he felt he had accomplished:

quelque chose de singulièrement différent, accident dont tout autre que moi s'enorgueillirait sans doute, mais qui ne peut qu'humilier profondément un esprit qui regarde comme le plus grand honneur du poète d'accomplir *juste* ce qu'il a projeté de faire (OCI, p.276).

The phrase 'tout autre que moi s'enorgueillirait' is an emphatic statement that Baudelaire believed himself to be above the common herd of his contemporaries, even though this belief was tinged with disappointment that he had not achieved exactly what he was capable of achieving.

Above all, Baudelaire's name is synonymous with modernity. It was his contribution to modernity which sets him in the vanguard of the major authors of the nineteenth century – the kind of modernity which cast aside the reverence for nature and the idealised goodness of man, but which nevertheless saw beauty in more unlikely and fleeting sources, like the figure of an old woman through a window, or the sadness on the face of a veteran 'saltimbanque', long since out of favour with the fickle public. It was these visions which he was able to capture and develop in his prose poems.

Baudelaire's concept of beauty owes a great deal to the definition given by Poe in his poetic theories – the kind of unattainable beauty that can only be glimpsed through art. Paradoxically, his modernity was all the more authentic because it came from an author who was temperamentally attached to a world

which was disappearing. For Baudelaire, much of nineteenth-century progress was a source of regret – a theme which he so eloquently portrayed in his prose poem, ‘Chacun sa Chimère’, where men feel the irresistible urge for progress without giving any real thought to where it would lead them. Yet his nostalgia for the past, and his reluctance to abandon it, serves to give his modernity even greater distinction.

The single most critical mental faculty which distinguished Baudelaire from his contemporaries was his imagination. In his art criticism (‘Salon de 1859’) he castigates painters whose principal aim is to imitate nature (*OCII*, p.631).

Likewise, he condemns the public for its appraisal of artistic merit based on the painter’s ability to produce as close a replica of a natural scene as possible. For Baudelaire, a painting has greater merit if the painter works from memory and deliberately allow his imagination to develop the original scene (*OCII*, p.698).

His contempt for the ideal of imitation in art was shared by Poe. In a perceptive reference to Poe’s work Todorov writes: “Ici, rien n’est imitation, tout est construction et jeu” (Todorov in Faber 1989, p.255). Exactly the same comment could have been made in regard to the work of Baudelaire.

It was Baudelaire’s imagination which enabled him to take the germ of an idea from Aloysius Bertrand, that of the prose poem, and exploit its potential to produce an anthology characterised by densité, intensité, gratuité and

mystère, which went far beyond the example set by Bertrand. The power of imagination was something he recognised in his reading of Poe. However, he is careful to distinguish between a facile kind of imagination which deals in fantasy and a more elevated kind of imagination which he describes as 'une faculté quasi divine' (*OCII*, p.329). This latter allows the author to perceive correspondences and analogies between things which are not immediately apparent. It enabled Baudelaire to see the parallels between poetry, painting and music in enabling the reader/observer/listener to elevate themselves beyond the 'quotidien' and glimpse the supernal beauty which is the object of art. Baudelaire contends that this faculty was particularly effective in Poe's tales but it also plays a role in *Eureka*, designated by the author as a prose poem, in which Poe combines a mastery of scientific principles with an imagination which is at the same time ambitious, but also subject to rigorous analysis and patient research.

If the power of imagination was a vital aspect of the authors' works, it could also be said that their cynicism, indeed pessimism, in regard to human nature, was a common theme in both. Poe was vehement in his condemnation of the Transcendentalists, prominent amongst whom were authors like Emerson, whose range of idealistic tenets included the innate goodness of mankind (Quinn 1957, p.255). It was Poe's belief that it was man's perversity that better

represented his natural state. It is not surprising, therefore, that Baudelaire recognised in Poe's tales his own view of mankind, reflecting the darker side of the human condition. This pessimistic outlook fitted well with the belief in original sin that he had acquired by his reading of Joseph de Maistre, setting him at odds with the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose belief was that man is naturally good and that only the development of human societies has led to his being corrupted.

My conclusions thus far have focused exclusively on what Poe did for Baudelaire. It is, perhaps, also appropriate, in comparing their work, to note the debt that Poe owes to Baudelaire. Judged solely by his impact on Anglo-Saxon literature, it is fair to say that critics like T.S. Eliot were lukewarm in their estimate of Poe's contribution to literature, but he was prepared to entertain the idea that the French had seen something in Poe that the American public had missed (Quinn 1957, p.8). Poe's impact on French literature was largely a result of the publication of Baudelaire's translations of his tales in his two collections of short stories, *Histoires extraordinaires* and *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*. These tales were as much re-written as they were translated, so that the final product presented to the French public was, in some respects, an improvement on the original version. Quinn (1957, p.109) goes as far as to suggest 'that the stories as Baudelaire tells them are literature, whereas Poe's

only aspire to be'. The subsequent renown which Poe acquired in France could therefore be attributed as much to his translator as to himself.

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